

**FRAGMENTS  
OF A VISION**

**By the same author :**

***World in a Grain of Sand***

# FRAGMENTS OF A VISION

*A Journey through India's Gramdan Villages*

*Erica Linton*

*Published for the Society for  
Developing Gramdams, New Delhi*

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*TO*  
**RADHAKRISHNA**



## FOREWORD

The future of India, I believe, will be decided, not in Delhi or Calcutta, nor in Bombay or Madras, but in her 500,000 villages and small towns. That is where 85 per cent of her population live and where most of them will continue to live for as long as we can meaningfully think ahead. If rural India fails, all India fails. *Mens sana only in corpore sano*, and equally: healthy cities only on the basis of healthy rural areas. Today, the sickness of cities is the direct result of the sickness—which may take many different forms—of the countryside; not in India alone, but the world over.

How welcome, therefore, to have a book about India which deals with the real India, the India of half a million villages, and which, moreover, deals with this vast and amorphous subject not by way of statistics or the bloodless abstractions of economic or political theory but by a straightforward report of "what I have seen and what I have heard". Erica Linton's report, of course, is fragmentary; this is dictated by the vastness of rural India; but it is not merely impressionistic: it presents "Fragments of a Vision", and the vision is one of rural reconstruction, rural regeneration through Gramdan.

Mrs. Linton set out to study what Gramdan is doing to Indian villages; in the process she had to find out what is the essence and meaning of Gramdan. It has to do with land ownership; it effects a kind of land reform; but there is much more to it than that. The creative spirit behind the Gramdan movement is Vinoba Bhave, who stands outside politics and does not seek political or any other power. He does not operate "from the

top, downwards" but "from the ground, upwards". How is this possible? How is it done? To work from the top, with power, through an administrative machine—this is something we can all understand, something the logical mind can grasp without difficulty. But to work from the "grass-roots", without power, without a vast administrative machine? What does it mean? How can it spread and multiply? From the grass roots level, assuredly, a man may change one village or even two or three—but thousands, hundreds of thousands? This the logical mind cannot really grasp; this is beyond logic, beyond social engineering. If it does happen—and it has happened again and again in human history; in fact, all the most profound changes have happened precisely in this way—it must be the result of certain spiritual forces working in an incalculable way. Not surprisingly, Vinoba Bhave is often referred to as a saint, just like his teacher Gandhi, whom he met in 1916 to become his trusted and faithful disciple.

The subject of Gramdan is therefore of more than ordinary interest to a world which believes in little else but engineering—social, economic, technical, and even genetical. Except, of course, that those who really do not believe in anything but engineering are probably incapable of taking any interest in such a thing, because for them it is nothing but the dream of a crank. And there are many people in India, as Mrs. Linton observes, who hear and know nothing about Gramdan. "If one moves within the movement, Sarvodaya workers and Gramdan villages seem to be everywhere. If one looks at it from without, from the view-point of people either not interested, or engrossed in the pursuit of other ideologies, or in self-centred occupations, one could easily dismiss Gramdan as a fringe activity of less than marginal importance."

However that may be, there are countless people in the world today, thoughtful people, some of them near desperation, who have ceased to put their trust in social engineering from the top, downwards. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*, they ask, who controls the controllers? And what motivates the motivators? These questions are decisive when the controllers, engineers, and motivators have power in their hands and can intimidate and coerce. But Vinoba has no power; Gramdan has

no power; so these age-old questions do not arise. If it is possible to effect change without power, surely this is what a world, oversaturated with the most awesome instruments of violence, is longing for; a path of change without violence, a revolution of non-violence.

This is what Mrs. Linton's book is about, because this is what Gramdan is about: a revolution of non-violence. In some villages it succeeds magnificently; in others, nothing happens, nothing at all, for ten years or more—and yet people claim that something *had* happened inside the villagers, a beginning of an awareness of their own potential. Maybe all that has happened is that the villagers have ceased taking one another to court, at crippling expense, and learned to settle disagreements amicably among themselves, just like the early Christians. Maybe they have been able to avoid getting into new debt with the moneylender because they helped one another out. Even where no change in land ownership has actually taken place, there have often been changes in depth, more mutual aid, more courage against overbearing authority, more interest in constructive change, more literacy, and perhaps more hope and self-reliance. When Mrs. Linton asked some villagers how much of the change in their village was due to their own efforts, they replied: "There are two factors. First there were those who initiated us, and secondly, by working together we achieved great things." Could it be put better?

However, there is need also for a third factor, besides initiation and co-operative self-reliance: there is need for systematic information, for a communication system at the level of self-help "intermediate" technology, which will effectively back up the self-reliant impulses of the villagers. Time and again Mrs. Linton has to report that villagers had been "initiated" by Gramdan workers and had aroused in themselves the right spirit, ready for constructive change, but "had no idea how to get advice and help". Nor did the Gramdan workers themselves have any idea. They could bring to the village only what they happened to know, and many of them were not highly trained. In other words, they were not able to, as it were, plug the village into an effective information—communication system. Why not? Basically, because no such

system has yet been brought into existence. There are beginnings, but these are feeble and obscure. Even the need for such a system does not appear to have been clearly recognised

In the rich world, at the level of high technology, there is a superb communications system through which an immensity of knowledge and experience can be tapped by anyone who wishes to do so. A new discovery or invention, a new finding of research, no matter how specialised or trivial, is immediately publicised through well-established channels and systematically incorporated into the "body" of public knowledge. What is known in London is simultaneously known, or knowable, in all the centres of advanced science and technology (unless it is intentionally kept secret for very special reasons), and *vice versa*. Without such a system of information-communication advanced science and technology could never have developed the way it has done.

Now, the point is that at the level of intermediate technology, of self-help technology, there is nothing of the kind. The most devoted, self-sacrificing, and, let us assume, successful, original work may have been done in one particular village, the kind of work from which millions of villages the world over would benefit—and the chances are that nobody outside that village ever hears about it or, if someone happens to hear of it, that he has no effective means of obtaining the information to enable him to do likewise. Hundreds of thousands of "constructive workers" in a hundred developing countries are working away with enthusiasm and loyalty, roughing it, sharing the poverty of the poor, but they cannot set in motion that cumulative process of successful achievement which alone could rescue the poor within a measurable period: like subsistence farmers they all work on basically the same problems, they all make the same mistakes, and they have little or no chance of learning from one another's failures or successes. This is the great failing in the world's development effort: a fatal oversight, but one that could be remedied without enormous effort and expense.

It has been rightly said that "good government can never be a substitute for self-government". It remains desirable, however, that self-government should also be good government,

and this is not possible unless self-government is supported by adequate information, know-how, and relevant knowledge. After freedom, what? After literacy, what? After Gramdan, what? Doors that have been locked are being opened, but it is still necessary to walk through these doors and then to do things better than they have been done before—better, that is, based on better knowledge, more accurately adjusted to reality.

I hope and trust that Mrs. Linton's most informative and realistic report on her travels through rural India will incidentally help to open people's eyes to the urgent need for a systematic organisation and communication of the kind of knowledge without which no change in the spiritual, ethical and social order can become effective economically. As I see it, this is the kind of follow-up now needed by the Gramdan movement: a much more intense orientation towards improved technological knowledge—at the intermediate, self-help level—and greatly improved communication of such knowledge and experience, for the benefit of all.

*E. F. Schumacher*





## PREFACE

In the following pages I have attempted to describe the remarkable experiment in Indian agrarian reform that goes by the name of Gramdan. In recent years there has been a tendency to play down the value and efficacy of this movement in solving India's rural problems. The Indian central and state governments are naturally anxious to publicise their own achievements. The Indian political parties insist that their own remedies are the only valid ones. But the Gramdan movement is rightly suspicious of both governmental and party political claims that ignore the need for grass-roots participation.

The Indian villager is by and large an intelligent person who has little confidence in urban politicians, and who will only be persuaded by advisers from outside if he is convinced that they are disinterested and have no ulterior motive. When he is persuaded that their advice will really help him to help himself, he will bestir himself and act.

This has been the experience of Gramdan over the years, and there is now evidence that after a period of comparative stagnation the movement is really making headway again today. It is estimated that more than a fifth of India's villages are participating in the movement. Not only villages but whole blocks and districts have committed themselves to Gramdan; and it is hoped that the whole State of Bihar will shortly become the first state to declare itself for the movement.

In this book I describe in depth my visits to key areas of the Gramdan movement all over India. I give a detailed picture of the day-to-day activities that are being undertaken, highlighting the good features and not hesitating to criticise the shortcomings. Through the help of Sarvodaya workers who inter-

preted for me, I was able to ask villagers of all classes and castes, from headman to landless labourer, what they thought about Gramdan and how it was helping them in their own lives.

I make no claims that all is well with the movement. Much more needs to be done. But it is at least an honest attempt to put life into rural India, to lift it up from apathy and stagnation, and to give new hope to millions of poverty-stricken Indians. It would be tragic if it were allowed to fail.

The ideals of Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, who are the inspirers and philosophers of Gramdan and Sarvodaya, are explained. What they have to say to the Indian rural situation has more than local interest and importance: it speaks to the human condition everywhere, and it may well be the third alternative to capitalism and communism for which so many are searching.

ERICA LINTON

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**E.L.**



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***" . . . .may it be reserved to India to evolve the true science of democracy by giving a visible demonstration."***

**GANDHI**





It happened one lovely day in June when the air was gentle and caressing and the countryside awash with soft pastel colours; a warm day of sun and light, of fleeting shadows and fluffy clouds high over our heads under a pale blue sky that dipped until its edges merged with the rolling fields and softly undulating downs in the distant haze of summer.

'We need a man in Bihar', they told John, 'can you go? We would like your answer after lunch'.

India, Bihar, drought, famine! Who didn't know about Bihar in the year 1967? What was there for us to decide? How could John not go when faced with such a challenge? 'But they don't want you', John said, 'there is no room for wives in this bachelors' set-up. What will you do?' 'I?' I thought for a moment. 'I'll come too, of course, I'll come. There'll be plenty for me to do once I get out there.'

We finished our bread and cheese and drove back to the office to let them know.

I rang up War-on-Want. 'Come and lunch with me, both of you', invited Frank Harcourt-Munning, the administrator. And so it happened that instead of going to India as a free-lance I had a definite assignment, I was going out on behalf of War-on-Want to report back on past and present projects financed with its funds.

The fine, warm June days mocked us in our rush to leave England. There was so much to do in the short time at our disposal that it was necessary for John to go first and for me to follow later. We had so much to plan and to discuss and talk about right up to the last moment that I drove John along the M.4. and past the London airport. neither of us noticing it until

we were nearly at Slough. We turned back and this time reached the airport safely. I watched his plane take off, then slowly drove back to London. A week later it was my turn. It was still warm and sunny in England !

Everything had been so quick. There had hardly been time to feel sad at saying so many good-byes or excited at returning to India, let alone to think. And already the flight was over and I was landing at Santa Cruz airport, Bombay.

For a few days life became one whirlwind of parties and of seeing friends, of gathering impressions, of watching and listening, until I flew on to Delhi. My round of visits became a little less hectic, my conversations a little more sober and more serious. And with every day I became more depressed and disturbed at the impact India was making on me this time, an impact which left me sadder and more depressed than I ever thought possible. A general atmosphere of disillusion penetrated society from an eminent retired politician at one end of the scale to the village headman at the other. To sum up the former's words briefly:

'At the top', he said, 'we have men who cling to power for the sake of power—there is no constructive governing. The country is heading for disaster. Perhaps only when we have reached this impasse can there be a change for the better.' He had always been a man of optimism, always seeing a way out and defending the shortcomings of his country and its government. 'I can do so no longer', he declared. His comments were therefore all the more shattering.

The sense of impending disaster was put equally strongly by an economist. 'Unless,' he said, 'we can pull back from the brink, there will be widespread riots, bloodshed and disorder!' His clear reasoning brain was concerned with the facts as he saw them and made his dry and unemotional statements all the more effective. 'There will have to be a completely revolutionary change in social and economic planning', he said, and continued to lecture me on lines I was to listen to again and again with slight variations.

At the other end of the social scale, the comments of the villager, no longer the old headman, but superseded by a much weaker man at the last village council election, were, even if

exaggerated, indicative, for he represents a large section of the rural community. The conversation arose out of a sense of indiscipline which could be strongly sensed throughout the village. 'It is this way', he began after some reflection. 'When the British were here discipline was enforced from the top down, it could be felt by everyone. Then came independence and the same discipline continued for a number of years. But look at our present government. It is weak, has been so for several years. The government's lack of discipline is reflected right through to the village level. For years the scheduled castes and the Harijans were told to assert their rights. They are now availing themselves of these rights by breaking the traditional ties which made the village function. Today they enter our temple—they use our wells, they can no longer be talked to or reasoned with. We have no open quarrels. But underneath the surface there is unrest and a lack of cohesion which is more menacing. At one time I was the head of my family. Today no one listens to me even in my own house. We have been given our freedom but we have not yet learned how to use it. The old structure of society is breaking down with nothing as yet to replace it. The pendulum has swung right over', he ended.

I followed up my visit to the village with a question to the Director of the School of Social Work and the secretary of the Social Welfare Board. 'Has it become more difficult to work in the villages during the last few years?' I asked. Both replies were identical and in the affirmative.

'The mistake we made,' explained another social scientist, 'is that we assumed that there was a community on which to build community development. What we should have done, what we need to do, is to start with the individual and create a new and different grouping with new leadership.'

A University professor, an Oxford post-graduate scholar who has had experience in the United States, France and West Germany, saw a new society emerging out of the breakdown of existing classes. He, as so many others with whom I talked, was disillusioned with the Congress party. 'The Congress movement should never have become a political party', he said. 'Too many Congress leaders have gone into the government without being politicians. They have remained reactionary and are un-

willing to give way to the younger generation. It is the same in the universities and other departments and institutions. The old hang on for the sake of power. Corruption, dishonesty and bribery are worse today than at any other time, especially among the older and middle-aged. But you will be glad to hear, as I know from my contact with students and graduates, that a great percentage of our young people are not only aware of corruption as an evil, but are themselves honest, and critical of their elders.'

The wide-spread cynicism amongst the educated and the well-to-do was equally disturbing. It spread like an infectious disease, further undermining any sense of responsibility. The cynics were sitting on the fence, watching, waiting, while eating, drinking and continuing to live lavishly. Many foreigners had caught the disease and were just as cynical. The minor embassy official, the foreign contractor here for six or twelve months, a year or two, felt himself hemmed in by frustration, bad working facilities and his own lack of vision and imagination. The mentality of the Indian workteam which could finish a job in one year but which procrastinates and stretches the time of construction to two-and-half or three years instead, was beyond his comprehension. How could he begin to understand the desperate need for hanging on to a job which means survival for the family even if at the same time it is ruinous to his country? How could he understand the mentality of the government servant who bound by security regulations will always toe the line, who bound by an ever present fear of losing his job through making a wrong decision will never make a decision at all? Life for the small employee is so insecure that he lives by one maxim only—to keep his job at whatever cost.

But the young too have not escaped. The engineering graduate was travelling home to Calcutta after taking his finals. 'What are you going to do now that you have your degree?' he was asked. 'Oh, probably, study economics', he replied. 'Why don't you use your engineering degree? Why not do something in the field of irrigation?' 'Irrigation!' he exploded, and his voice screeched to a falsetto. 'I have just been to Bihar. Do you know what is happening there?' And he proceeded to tell us of an incident of corruption over a well-digging project, speaking

with utter contempt and cynicism. 'Get involved in this?' he ended and shrugged his shoulder.

'What we need', commented another social scientist, 'is a compulsory national service of one or two years for every young person in this country, be he the prime minister's son or the least youth in the villages or slums of our cities. Let us pick up the jobless, whether they are graduates or landless peasants, and organise them into building roads, into doing any kind of constructive work, anything which will get this country on its feet. This is not dictatorship—this is practical common sense!'

The young professional Indian photographer expressed his cynicism differently. As a free-lance he had travelled widely abroad as well as covering the whole of the Indian sub-continent at grass-root level. 'You people', he said, referring to those of us involved in the work of voluntary agencies, 'are doing no good to India, nor does foreign aid. Don't feed the people and save them. Let two million die during the famine. This is the only way to make the people in the villages begin to help themselves and wake the government up.'

The failure of rationing and the hardship caused by it was a constant topic of conversation. At parties and weddings where food was offered with lavish abandon, rationing had become a nasty word. For people with money but without a conscience no problem existed. Everything could be had in the Black Market. Wheat, sugar, rice, kerosine oil, the rationed items, cost three times as much and were openly displayed. There was no question of 'under the counter'.

Like anything else that is tied up in the red-tape of bureaucracy the effort of obtaining or renewing ration cards was so laborious as to defeat many. The unemployed and those with large families could not afford to pay even the subsidized prices and did not buy all their rations. What happened to the rations not taken up is obvious. Distributors gave out rations at the front of their stalls and conducted a roaring black market business at the back.

Many people were just not concerned with rationing. Practically everyone had at least one provision merchant loosely related to him, who would always be able to supply what was needed.

A cloth merchant exclaimed, 'What is the point of rationing! There would be enough food for every body if supplies did not go underground. We had a police raid near here yesterday and they found large stores full of grain'. The tales were endless. Few people cared. Those who did seemed to be holding back a landslide with their bare hands.

On the whole little had changed since I was last in India two years ago. It gave me an uncanny feeling that, while there was hardly a ripple on the surface, underground new currents were beginning to rise.

I left Delhi for Benares, the holiest among holies of Indian cities, by a third-class air-conditioned train, one of the best innovations of the much maligned Indian railways. In the early hours of next morning we reached Moghul Sarai. I got my suitcase and myself on to the platform and waited. Two white khadi-clad figures approached me. Subramanian and Sakharwade from the Sarva Seva Sangh office had come to meet me. They greeted me with warm smiles and took me in charge. Conversation staggered along haltingly. We were all a little shy. Even so their kindness was unlimited and I had yet to learn to succumb to their way of showing it instead of trying to stem the tide of their goodwill.

For a few miles we travelled by car, then crossed the Ganges by a huge two-tier bridge about a mile long, a network of iron struts and rafters and seven vast arches spanning the river. Trains rumble across on the lower tier, motor traffic on the upper. Immediately on leaving the bridge the road turns into Rajghat and the compound where the Sarve Seva Sangh has its headquarters as well as housing the Gandhian Institute of Studies. I was taken to the guest-room and given some breakfast, and after some rest was shown the office buildings and introduced to the staff. A great many of them live in pleasant premises inside the compound and on that first day I found it almost impossible to know people as individuals or connect them with their families.

Radhakrishna, the Sangh's secretary, practically my only known contact, was away until the following evening so that I had plenty of time to wonder about my future programme—and also to explore a little. I was charmed by the setting of the

compound on the banks of the Varuna on the one side and flanked by the Ganges on the other. I went for a walk, taking the road along the Ganges, passing the New Education Foundation, the Basant College and other schools until the road ended at the confluence of the two rivers. There were villagers and village huts, buffaloes and cattle from the nearby farm, the ever-present tea stall and the temple at the water's edge. A ferry boat overloaded with people moved away from the bank to cross to the other side and another village. The wide bands of water stretched in three directions as into eternity, edged by the yellow sands and the first faint green of monsoon-drenched fields. A sight so pastoral, so peaceful in its timelessness, changed only by the rhythm of the seasons, as ancient as the city of Benares claims to be. Benares, strong-hold of Hinduism, city of temples and bathing ghats, of holy men and sadhus, of cows, stray dogs and donkeys, of cycle rickshaws, barrow boys and lorries, of cars and buses and of people. People and more people, filling narrow lanes of tall and ancient houses beautifully painted standing cheek by jowl with humble crumbling dwellings. Hundreds of tiny narrow lanes run through the city like an intricate network of lace. They are the nerves and veins and arteries, the very life stream of this pulsing, pushing, clammering and noise-wracked holy place.

The hours of loneliness passed and it was time to meet Radhakrishna and his family. It is almost impossible to remember what he said to me at this first meeting, what at consequent ones, except for the one salient point. 'I don't want you just to go around Indian villages to see that the money from War-on-Want has been used for the construction of wells, the supply of agricultural implements and so on. I would like you to study Gramdan and how it is functioning in all its aspects, to report to me as well as to War-on-Want, and if you can, write a book to let people abroad, and in India too, know what we mean by Gramdan.'

— What an opportunity for me, what a task!

I was introduced to innumerable people at the Sangh. They talked about Gramdan, Bhoodan, Vinoba, Gandhi, and I listened. I felt as if a deluge was sweeping over me, drowning me, blurring the edges of my perception, so that I lost much of

what I was told among the welter of information which was pouring over me. At the same time I was reading much of the available literature on the various subjects and after a week or so I began to have a clearer idea of the meaning of Gramdan.

When early in the 1950s I first read Hallam Tennyson's book on Vinoba Bhave, 'Saint on the March', I was deeply stirred. Society not only in India, but also in the West looked towards Vinoba for an answer to the many social problems besetting mankind. But the first dynamic sweep of success slowed down, and when Gramdan followed Bhoodan the world was too busy and only the few continued to be interested and concerned.

By the time I left for Bodhgaya in Bihar, only a week after I had arrived at Benares, I had learned a few essentials and knew a kind of one-dimensional aspect. I realised Gramdan was not simply a gifting of land belonging to individual villagers to the village community or merely a land reform movement but embodied within it a whole philosophy which seeks to bring about by means of a non-violent revolution a social order free from exploitation and serfdom. It is claimed that at the root of all exploitation lies the power of ownership, the drive for the accumulation of possessions. Gandhi's love and compassion for the landless, the jobless, the downtrodden impoverished masses resulted in his 'Theory of Trusteeship' which envisages the ownership of all kinds of wealth by the community and its use by the individual as a trustee. The idea of Gramdan in its broadest sense is based on the principle of trusteeship. It may be argued that this theory resembles the communist pattern in which the non-ownership of land acts as a disincentive to increased production. But there is a distinct difference. Under Gramdan land is surrendered voluntarily to the village community which is entrusted with all the rights and privileges, and not to the State. Gramdan seeks to wipe out class inequality, to generate people's self-reliant powers, to transform individual virtues or assets of truth, non-possession and non-violence into social forces by an evolutionary process which generates its energy from below—from the broad-based masses of the social structure.

Vinoba Bhave, the creative spirit behind the movement, was born in 1896. At the age of ten he embraced a life of celibacy



and all his future studies and contacts were directed towards following the path of righteousness. Any abnegation of the things pertaining to an affluent life were a means towards seeking the truth on all levels. He has become one of the most catholic minds in India and firmly believes that life must encompass both science and spirituality. Man cannot escape his responsibility in the world of today by escaping into an existence of otherworldly realities.

Vinoba first met Mahatma Gandhi in 1916 and became his trusted and faithful disciple. But not until 1951 did Vinoba come into the public eye. Armed Indian Communists taking advantage of troubles in Hyderabad killed landlords in the district of Telengana and distributed their property among the landless peasants. Three thousand people were killed and 35,000 jailed before Government troops restored order. Vinoba, following an inner call, went into the violence-riven area in search of a solution. Thus Bhoodan was born and Gramdan evolved naturally when the whole village of Mangroth in the U.P. offered its land as a donation in 1953. Following the gift of one village, the next step was to aim at the gift of a block, a district, a state and finally "Swaraj-dan", the land of all India.

Vinoba's health no longer permits long treks across the country but for all his physical frailty the power of his mind is undiminished and he remains, as before, the pivot of the movement. He is called a saint by many of his followers but the word 'saint' has many connotations and to call Vinoba by that name can be misleading if it overlooks his great humanity, his wonderful sense of humour, his sharp intellect and practical approach to matters at hand.

The Sarva Seva Sangh was constituted in 1948 to embrace various Gandhian organisations with the object of building a non-exploitative society, based on truth and non-violence and free from State control. It aims at preserving the moral values of society, furthering the process of integration, and eradicating discrimination due to colour, sex, religion, caste or race; at promoting co-operative effort and removing economic disparities through Khadi and decentralised village industries; and at working towards peaceful solutions of conflicts and stimulating harmony and compassion among the people.

The Sarva Seva Sangh encompasses today a three-fold programme; Gramdan, Khadi, and Shanti Sena. Gramdan is the logical development of Bhoodan; village-oriented Khadi is the symbol of decentralised village industries. The Shanti Sena works towards establishing peaceful solutions to conflicts, removing tensions and preventing outbreaks of violence.

Gramdan literally means 'village gift'. But in the sense in which Vinoba uses the term, it means the equitable distribution of the village's wealth. It implies that all the land-owners in a village transfer the ownership of their entire land to the village community; and that all landholders donate one twentieth of their land to the village community for distribution among the landless. It also implies the formation of a village fund to which the agriculturist will contribute one fortieth of his produce, the businessman one thirtieth of his profits and the wage earner and the salaried one thirtieth of their earnings; and the setting up of the village council (Gram Sabha) consisting of all the adults in the village.

The pre-requisites for a Gramdan declaration by a village are that at least 75% of the resident land-owners of the village should express their willingness to join Gramdan by signing the declaration; at least 51% of the total land in the village, owned by all the resident land-owners, should come under Gramdan; and at least 75% of the adult population of the village should opt for Gramdan.

Equipped with this basic knowledge I arrived at Bodhgaya where the Buddha obtained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree 2,500 years ago. Today the Buddhists of India, China, Thailand and Tibet each have their temple and monastery there. Pilgrims from Buddhist countries and world tourists flock to the shrines filled with religious devotion or out of cultural interest. There is little else at Bodhgaya, apart from the temples, a small bazaar and a tourist bungalow, except for Dwarko and his co-workers at the Samanwaya (Harmony) Ashram.

John had met my train at Gaya and we were staying at the

Tourist Bungalow, anxious to catch up on all that had happened to us since we said goodbye only a few weeks ago at London airport. The tourist bungalow, as well as catering for tourists, had become the meeting point for the many relief workers then operating and travelling in Bihar. Everyone knew Dwarko and Dwarko knew everybody. I was curious to meet this small dynamo whose energy affected villagers, co-workers and foreign volunteers alike.

I was soon sitting opposite him in the small square room which served as his office and bedroom. He is a short stocky man with a square firm jaw and smiling brown eyes, extending a spontaneous warmth to everyone he meets. He comes from Sind, and Sindhis are known for their good business sense. Perhaps it is this which accounts for Dwarko's drive and determination.

Dwarko told me about himself and the beginnings of the ashram, while outside the rain fell down in a heavy monsoon shower. Dwarko first made contact with Vinoba in 1946 at the age of twenty-two, when he spent some school holidays (he was then teaching) in his company. After partition he joined Vinoba at his ashram in December 1947. In 1948 he took charge of the ashram as its manager and stayed until he came to Bodh-gaya in 1953 to start the Samanwaya Ashram and promote the doctrine of non-violence.

When Vinoba came to Bihar in 1955 Dwarko met him. 'What new subjects shall I teach at my ashram,' he asked him. Vinoba told him, 'Teach harmony between the religions, between science and spirituality and life itself.' Dwarko then asked for advice regarding the practical side. 'You work out your own scheme,' Vinoba replied typically. Dwarko worked out a scheme which required Rs. 18,000 a year in finances. Vinoba dismissed the scheme. 'You were with me in Wardha', he reminded Dwarko, 'there we lived without asking for financial grants. You can do the same here.' So in the year 1955 Dwarko collected Rs. 900 in gifts for himself and his co-workers and lived on what they produced themselves on the farm. 'On 2nd October, Gandhi's birthday, we had dug one plot and were ready to sow wheat. Three months later we harvested two maunds of grain', he told me proudly. 'You

see,' he pointed out, 'if I had taken a large loan then we would never have succeeded in creating the farm out of barren land and produced our own food as we are doing today. We have the highest yield in the area from our three acres. Wasn't Vinoba right?'

'When people saw the earnestness with which we tackled the work they helped us with gifts in kind and money. Our life of simplicity and hard labour created the right reaction among those who came to watch and to see what was going on.'

Among those who came to see and watch was a potter. He looked at Dwarko's dairy cows and was given a glass of milk. He went home thoughtfully. For the next few months he became obsessed with one thought. 'I must have a cow. I must have a cow', he chanted to the hum of his potter's wheel. 'At last he had saved enough to go to market. 'At last my children will have milk,' he told himself as he led the scraggy beast home to his poor dwelling. The cow had been in calf some time ago and was as dry as the grass around the potter's-mudhut. The potter waited to milk the cow, the cow waited to get some nourishing fodder and to be served by a bull. With every week that passed both potter and cow got more dejected. I can't have the cow die on my door step, thought the potter, and one quiet night he led the miserable beast to the Samanwaya Ashram and tied her to the gate-post. There Dwarko found her next morning. He called in a 'vet'. 'Nothing wrong with the animal', he said. 'She is nearly starved to death. You just feed her up.' Dwarko did. After a few months the cow filled out and soon was in calf. When I looked at her the calf was drinking lustily and the cow produced a good many litres of milk daily. Poor potter-he will know better next time.

Dwarko is an optimist and an inveterate beggar. He will stop at nothing and before no one. He combines in himself a 'humble conceit', a trend I was to notice in many Sarvodaya workers.

After a very simple lunch Dwarko and I set off for Hariya village. The downpour had stopped but heavy rainclouds still shrouded the distant low hills in a fine-spun mist. It was hard to imagine that not so long ago the earth had been baked dry and cracked for want of moisture. For today new life was

bursting forth. The lush green of young growth covered the land as far as the eye could reach. Rows of healthy paddy plants stood erect like sentinels in their banded plots; cattle grazed lustily and newborn kids frolicked and bucked along the roadside. Women were busily transplanting seedlings, their backs bent and their feet ankle deep in muddy water. Men guided their bullock teams, ploughing or harrowing the now sodden soil, or they were baling water on to the fields with a leather bucket and the rhythmic swing of ropes. The countryside was alive with new-found energy.

Dwarko drove the jeep as he did everything else, hard, relentlessly, without a let-up. For twenty-six miles we roared along a main road, then turned inland into no-man's land along rutted tracks filled with mud and water. It was the first of many such rides when the jeep clung to banks at precarious angles and leapt across holes and boulders like a bolting horse. On either side of the track stretched terraced shrubland interspersed with all kinds of trees, as part of a soil conservation programme. After about two miles, even the jeep could go no further, but now Hariya village was within sight.

It is hard to describe life as it is lived in the thirty mudhuts which make up this small hamlet. The level of existence is such that a new word has to be coined to express the degree of poverty. As by a miracle some of the mudwalls have withstood the rains of the last month without crumbling. Within the leaking, dripping darkness of the huts there is not one utensil to be seen, no clothes—nothing. An occasional broken down string-bed stands in the hungry emptiness.

The 1966/67 famine only intensified a poverty which had been with the 150 people of Hariya for more decades than any of them cared to remember. Each year food supplies ran out after five or six months. There was nothing left to eat except the leaves of the nearby trees and wild roots scratched from the hard-baked soil. What did it matter if the famine increased the barren months from six to eleven or even twelve months? Hunger meant nothing any longer to the people of Hariya, for it had become as much part of their bodies as the rags that clung to their nakedness.

The feeding programmes of the relief committees had some-

how by-passed this village. There was no school to act as a distribution centre, nor was another village within easy reach, where such a centre operated. 'I'd like to go to school', said one little boy. The children had been closing in on me like a manoeuvring army on a battlefield, only much more quickly. But there was no school for him to go to. Did he want to learn, I wondered, or had he heard of free school meals? Was it craving for knowledge or for food that had prompted his remark?

Although the feeding programme had by-passed the village, Gramdan had not. But since that day in 1954 when the villagers signed the declaration, many years had passed when there was nothing to sustain them but hope. Or had the passage of time become meaningless for a people whose days were spent in an endless struggle for mere survival? Whatever the reason, to-day, hope, patience, or even apathy have been rewarded. I was shown wells in various stages of completion, built with funds from War-on-Want. A failing monsoon would never hit the village quite as hard again.

'What has it meant to you that your village has accepted Gramdan?' I asked one of the men working at the well site. 'This is my land', he simply answered. Previously, before land distribution, he had worked the same plot of land belonging to an absentee landlord in Gaya. He had laboured hard and produced little for the owner and even less for himself and his family. Did the ownership of a small plot of land mean that much to a man who up to now was no better off than he had been before, I wondered.

Across the field stumped a tall angular man carrying a long pole with which he now and then supported himself. He was the headman hurrying to join us. His head was covered with grizzly grey hair, and tufts of soft black whiskers grew out of his ears. He was illiterate like everybody else in the village but there was wisdom in his eyes and gentleness in his face. 'Since we accepted Gramdan', he told us, 'we have learned to care for one another as a community. I and they', and he pointed at the men near the well, 'belong to different castes. Today we discuss our problems with one another and try to solve them together when the village council meets. Formerly we only

looked after our own affairs. We haven't yet got a village fund or a village store', he continued, 'we know about them and that it is our duty to make contributions. But there has never been enough for our needs. How could we give when we have nothing?' 'Now that I have a well', interrupted one of the younger men, 'I'll be able to make my contribution. Yes, this year we shall all do it.' He lifted his chin and stared fiercely at the other men near him, and they responded with slow smiles and nodding heads, half in doubt and half in hope.

• In the face of unchanged conditions, in spite of Gramdan, in spite of a number of wells in various stages of completion, their comments seemed almost unbelievable. Did ownership of a handful of earth mean that much to the men and women who were as hungry today as they had been thirteen years ago? Can hope for change through a new community feeling be sustained that long?

'People from nearby villages come to us and want to know about Gramdan', said the headman as if reading my thoughts. 'They ask us questions and we tell them what we know'. And he proceeded to talk about the brotherhood of man and the need of people to care one for another. 'I know', said the old man, 'we all carry the spark of God within us'.

It was time to go. We walked back to the jeep, men and children following, the women standing in a tight cluster, staring after us from the safety of their houses. Half-way to the main road we stopped at another well. Suddenly I noticed the slim figure of a young girl of about twelve years, carefully walking through the trees. In her hands she carried a small vessel of milk which she had collected from the distribution centre two miles away and was now taking back to her family. There could hardly have been enough milk in that pot for two children, yet this child who must have been as hungry as her waiting brothers and sisters never faltered or thought of taking one little sip but walked unhesitatingly home, holding the pot in front of her like a casket of gold, her brow knitted in concentration, lest she spill one drop of the precious liquid.

There is a difference between village children and town urchins who will fight over a morsel of food like wild dogs. And I was fervently praying that Gramdan would sustain self-

respect and bring self-help to the rural areas before the last vestige of self-control and dignity broke down.

We next stopped along the road at a grain distribution centre under Dwarko's administration. While he talked I studied the faces of the women squatting before us. Their clothes had that grey indefinite colour which comes from endless washing, impregnated with dust. Dust which sticks and clings and rubs sores into skins and holes into cottons. The women's hair was as dull and lustreless as their eyes, the skin of their faces drawn tightly across their cheek bones and falling into deep hollows where healthy cheeks should round the face; and about the eyes the crows' feet and wrinkles were puckered as if made of finest tissue paper. They were some of the people who did not fit into any category for receiving rations.

We were on the road again and drove in silence through the evening dusk. I was deep in thought when Dwarko spoke. 'All the agencies distribute food to the people', he said, 'but there is not one which will do anything for the starving cattle. Why?' This was difficult to answer. 'I think human beings take priority over animals when there is scarcity', I ventured. And then followed one of those inane conversations when it is difficult to remain logical. It started with the cow and went on to food, and ended with Dwarko telling me that he would not eat honey. Why? Because the bees produce the honey for themselves. 'But if they produce more honey than they need, if there is a surplus, why not use it?' I asked him. 'How do I know the bees like me to eat their honey, I can't ask them,' he said. This was almost too much for me. I didn't even dare to smile. What queer quirk caused him to think like this! 'You drink the milk from your cows, don't you?' I came back at him. 'You don't ask them for permission, do you?' 'No', he replied, 'and I shouldn't drink milk either, but we must take something', he excused himself, and turned on me. 'You people kill to eat'. 'You use insecticides on your farm?' I attacked him anew. 'Yes', he replied. 'Then you also kill to eat, if not directly then certainly indirectly', I said. Dwarko thought for a long time. 'One must compromise', he sighed.

It was all rather puzzling.





WHERE TIME HAS NO MEANING AND MEMORY IS LONG

*All photographs by the author*



'BUT THE MEN SAID THEY HAD MORE TO EAT NOW  
"OH, MEN WILL ALWAYS SAY THAT" (pg. 171)



PERHAPS MY CHILD HAS A FUTURE NOW



"I AM ALIVE!" (pg. 111)

From Gaya I went on to Patna to meet Jaya Prakash Narayan, the Sarvodaya leader, who had set up his own relief committee for Bihar, and then returned to Benarés. Almost immediately I left again for my first visit to Govindpur where Agrindus, the Victor Gollancz Memorial Institute, was beginning to take shape. Back again to Benares and on to Delhi for the survey of one of the few War-on-Want projects outside Gramdan.

Meanwhile Radhakrishna was arranging my next tour into Gramdan areas so that when I reached Benares again there was just time to turn round and catch the Doon Express for Calcutta and go on from there to Kharagpur in West Bengal.

Kharagpur has one of those endless station platforms where one walks past trains and office buildings wondering if one will ever reach the exit. I hadn't gone very far when a tall young khadi-clad man halted in front of me. 'Are you Mrs. Erica?' he asked, and when I nodded, a huge smile spread across his handsome intelligent face. If I had had any apprehension beforehand at finding myself in a strange and unknown situation, Robin Mukherjee's easy and lively talk during our few miles' jeep ride to the Abhoy Ashram dispelled any misgivings. But I had yet to meet Kshitish Roy Choudhury, who welcomed me at the ashram with an irresistible warmth. Shorter than Robin he is a man whose smooth round features and limbs match a well-rounded personality.

The Abhoy Ashram was founded in 1921 by Mahatma Gandhi with the object of building a non-violent society. It was then situated at Comilla in East Bengal. After partition

the ashram was reconstituted at Balarampur about 70 miles west of Calcutta and four miles from the big railway junction of Kharagpur. Dr. P.C. Ghosh, former Chief Minister of West Bengal, is the present president. At the time of my stay Dr. Ghosh held the office of Food Minister in the United Front Government of West Bengal, an unenviable position.

The work of the ashram outside its institutional activities is mainly concentrated in eight villages in the Balarampur area, comprising a population of 3000. But there is lively contact with most villages in the two Kharagpur blocks with a total population of 135,000. The twenty-five staff members at the ashram have recently been reinforced by volunteers from Australia, Canada and Britain. Much of the financial support comes from 'Community Aid' of Australia, from War-on-Want, and from 'Feed the Hungry' of West Germany. The German contribution is mainly geared towards sponsoring pupils in the basic school by the now familiar adoption method. An individual donation from Sweden made possible the construction of the small maternity unit in the compound.

Vinoba came to Balarampur in 1963, with the result that forty Gramdans were declared in the two Kharagpur blocks. About 20% of the land in the Balarampur area is owned by wealthy absentee landlords and until such time as they willingly make their land contribution their acres cannot be touched. In the crowded villages of West Bengal the 5% of land which owners donate to the village council for distribution to the landless under Gramdan is too small and too scattered to make large-scale co-operative farming possible. Faced with this problem Kshitish Roy Choudhury started a land-pool. There are three categories of contributors to the pool. 1. Land belonging to three of the richest landowners in the area together with some ashram land is cultivated at a fixed rent. 2. Some of the richer villagers who wanted to sell part of their large holdings have sold this to the pool. In due course this land will be made over to landless villagers. 3. Some poor villagers wanted to sell their small plots of land to pay off debts. This land too has been taken over by the land-pool and the profits from the co-operative cultivation in which they are involved will pay off their debts. Altogether there are forty-

two acres in the landpool and thirty-one landless families from five villages in the Balarampur area are participating in a well worked out programme, using new methods of cultivation.

It may be argued that the land-pool scheme is far removed from the ideal of Gramdan, but it must be remembered that circumstances forced Kshitish Roy into doing something practical immediately to alleviate the villagers' dire distress. The difficulties and hurdles which had to be overcome were a valuable experience on which to build development in the future.

The ashram has its own dairy which produces milk well above the average village cows, and a deep-litter poultry unit with a yield in numbers and size vastly superior to the scraggy village fowl. Since the ashram started working twenty years ago many villagers have begun to grow vegetables and pulses on small plots around their huts in response to the kitchen-garden activities at the ashram. Several village industries are being promoted, mainly spinning, and the dehusking of paddy; bee-hives have been introduced for honey. There is a training centre for soap and khadi production. Only non-edible oils are used in the soap manufacture. There is a work shop, a printing press and an oil press producing high-quality mustard oil. A women's club teaches sewing by hand and machine to village women.

The ashram also conducts a basic nursery, primary and secondary school, which is recognised by the government. The 200 pupils are drawn from nearby villages. The principle of basic education seeks to train the body as well as the mind and to inculcate into the pupils the dignity of manual labour.

Some eighty-two village development workers from all over West Bengal have been trained at the ashram. The Kasturba National Memorial Trust, set up in memory of Gandhiji's wife, has its headquarters for West Bengal at Balarampur, and runs an eight-bedded maternity hospital and a child welfare centre three miles away.

I have given a rather detailed account of the ashram activities, the first of many such institutions I was to visit in the course of the next few months, each of them based on similar principles with varying emphasis on different activities.

Kshitish Roy Choudhury told me briefly about some of these activities, mainly the land-pool, as we sat together on his verandah in the gathering evening dusk. We talked about the social and economic change Gramdan tried to bring about, but soon drifted to more profound subjects of a philosophical and religious nature. It was easy to talk to this dedicated man whose intelligent approach took advantage of modern techniques and whose actions blended a spiritual serenity with practical application. Unfortunately he had to leave the following morning and much of our talk was inconclusive.

I was given the use of a small one-roomed house of a simplicity which I was later to regard as having been luxurious. Heavy rains had made many villages inaccessible and my visit to Soladahar, normally within walking distance, had to be cancelled. But as it happened four men from the village had business at the ashram and Robin brought them along to the little house. They squatted on their haunches in front of us as one or two other workers joined our group. I talked to the two old men first. 'What do you need most?' I asked. 'Food', they said without hesitation. Soladahar was a small backward Gramdan village with no resources whatever. The villagers were given some fishing nets bought with funds from War-on-Want, which eased their situation a little. 'After food, what is your next greatest need?' I continued questioning them. 'More food', they replied. 'Yes, but if one day you can grow enough food, what is your next greatest need other than food?' I persisted. 'Grow more food' came the reply again. I turned to the two younger men. 'What do you need apart from food?' 'Let us have more food first, let us have enough food', they answered. We tried in several ways, putting the question differently each time, but in vain. For these men only one thought existed—food and more food, and beyond this?—a life of hardship interspersed with birth, death and religious festivals. What meaning can Gramdan have for them?

The villagers left and our conversation turned to Khādi. I argued that Khadi had failed, that it was stock-piling in large stores in cities like Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta, that it was more costly than mill cloth; that it seemed to me that any industry, however much relief it was giving to the unemployed



in the villages, should not be continued unless it could become marketable. 'How', I had asked, 'could that be achieved if mill cloth was being sold in rural areas?' 'But there is a government plan controlling mill cloth and Khadi in urban and rural areas respectively, which has not yet been implemented', the workers told me. I imagined this was due to the recent elections and changing administrations, and asked when this plan had been introduced. When I was told that it happened during the first five year plan I nearly hit the roof. Here were three or four of the finest young Sarvodaya workers telling me this as if it had happened a few months ago and calmly accepting the situation.

I soon learnt that the Khadi industry had become a problem as difficult to disentangle as the 'Gordian knot'.

The others left while Robin and I sat on, surrounded by ever curious children, as he told me about himself. I wanted to know why some of the younger generation had become interested in the Sarvodaya and Gramdan movements, what had motivated them to join.

Robin was born in a West Bengal village in 1928. His father, a Government officer in the excise department, was posted from district to district in both East and West Bengal. In 1945 after graduating in 'commerce', Robin too entered Government Service in Calcutta. There he came in contact with Congress workers and learnt to spin. Even while at school, he had been involved in social service activities. During the Calcutta troubles in 1946 Gandhi visited the city and Robin attended many of his prayer meetings. Out of curiosity he began to read Gandhi's writings. He then joined a social service group in Calcutta, attended their discussion meetings and in his spare time worked with them in slum areas. These activities brought him into contact with the Abhoy Ashram and Kshitish Roy Choudhury. He gave up his government job in 1949, left Calcutta and joined the ashram as secretary of the Kasturba Trust. He gave up studying for his M.A., believing his new life to be of more importance. By now he was deeply involved in rural welfare work on Gandhian lines. In 1952 he left the Kasturba Trust to participate in S.C.I. work camps in Assam. 'They were the most fascinating months of my life'.

he exclaimed, and even while telling me his dark eyes sparkled. 'Those months opened up new horizons for me,' he continued. He did not return to the Abhoy Ashram but went to Khadigram in Bihar where he met Dharendra Mazumdar, one of the most profound thinkers in the Gramdan world. Before returning to the Abhoy Ashram he became Indian secretary of S.C.I. in Delhi for one year. When Vinoba toured West Bengal in 1963 Robin accompanied him at intervals and eventually joined the Delhi-Peking Peace March as interpreter. He married in 1954 and has three children. His wife works as a teacher at the ashram. Robin has two books to his credit, written in Bengali; one on Gandhian economic philosophy, the other a handbook for training centres.

With this background and the Bengali's natural intelligence and charm it was not surprising that Robin made a delightful companion during my Bengal tour.

I didn't know how fortunate I was that the Abhoy Ashram owned a mechanically sound jeep. In this we proceeded on the following day to Abdalipur and the Aloke Kendra, a trip of about twenty-five miles. The last mile we had to walk on foot. The rain had held off and although the track was muddy it was walkable.

Rabindranath Sen, a lively small Bengali, is in charge of the centre. In his early years he had been deeply involved in the Independence fight and spent many years in and out of prison. The site of the present centre, a mile away from his father's village, was then an area of sandy patches and shrubland. From 1930 onwards it became a focal point for the running of the Independence movement. In 1937 he built the first cottage with his co-workers and began constructive work, village uplift and basic education. After returning from one of his prison sentences in 1944, he found all his work destroyed, burnt to the ground by government forces. Undaunted he began again and built up an ashram on the now familiar pattern.

One of its outstanding features is the use of the printing press for the production of a weekly six-page newspaper with a circulation of 700 copies. Roughly 95% of the paper goes to villages on regular subscriptions by school teachers. The

paper's contents are mainly concerned with social welfare, village schools, agricultural problems, unemployment of rural youth, co-operatives and panchayat affairs. It expresses villagers' needs for roads, schools, etc., and voices villagers' complaints regarding malpractices by government officials. It also prints poems written by local village youths.

The nine acres of ashram land are unproductive through lack of irrigation facilities. An attempt had been made at digging a tube well but was abandoned through lack of know-how and technical advice—quite apart from finances; a state of affairs with which I was to be frequently confronted. Whatever work has been undertaken in the few surrounding Gramdan villages was not sufficiently spectacular to persuade non-Gramdanis to join the movement. At the same time, a constant throng of villagers passed in and out of the centre compound intent on this or that, asking advice, or attending classes as in the case of the few women who had overcome the deadening apathy which held most of them village bound. I was dismayed to find mill cloth in the Khadi shop, — because 'the villagers ask for it!', and remembered our conversation of the previous evening.

True to the time of year, the heavens opened in the afternoon and rain fell down with unabated force until the centre became an island surrounded by mud-drenched streams. The rain stopped as abruptly as it had begun, and with incredible speed much of the water seeped into the ground or collected in ruts and shallows, leaving the track to the main road a winding snake of glistening shiny mud. It's not too bad, I thought, until I started walking, and for about a hundred yards I managed. Then I began slipping and losing my chappals which got sucked into the soft bubbling surface like objects sinking into quicksand. Men and women workers were accompanying us and of course countless children. As soon as I began to slither and lose my balance, hands stretched out from all sides and steadied me. They carried my chappals, and young bodies and small hands held me upright and led me safely along the treacherous surface, while the soft mud squelched through my toes.

On the following day we played safe and instead of ventur-

ing into the interior drove first to the village of Khemoshuli lying on the main Kharagpur-Midnapore road, about seven miles from the former. We walked across some rough land and waded through a shallow stream to a small school building to talk to the men who had assembled there. The women were watching from a distance, standing in the shelter of their homes. But not the children. They were everywhere fighting for the best vantage point to get a glimpse of the foreigner. The total population of the village declared Gramdan in 1963. My knowledge of Gramdan and Gramdan villages was so limited that I gathered information at random, not knowing what I was looking for, except of course to find out how War-on-Want funds had been applied. So I let the men tell me what they wanted me to know. The total land amounts to 200 acres, but only 40% are cultivable and of this ten to twelve acres belong to absentee landlords. This doesn't leave much for a community of sixty-three families of which forty-five are landless. The men had constructed a small dam. The recent heavy rains had breached it and the precious water was pouring away instead of irrigating sixty acres of paddy land. They said wells were not suitable; a tube well had been attempted in a nearby village but the project had been dropped. No help had come from the block office. It was the same problem as at the Aloke Kendra, lack of know-how and technical advice. The men knew what they wanted: irrigation, improved seeds and fertilisers. What they did not know was how to set about obtaining it. They also wanted medical facilities; they had none closer than seven miles, a long way to walk or be taken in a bullock cart when sick. No doctor ever visits the village. Before we left we looked at the village grain store, built with free labour and funds from War-on-Want. It is an open room in the loft of a good type village house, beautifully clean, containing thirty maunds (2400 pounds) of paddy, but open to damp and rats.

The villagers had declared Gramdan in the hope of better things to come. What chance had they to fulfil their aspirations? At this stage I hardly knew any of the answers.

We moved on to Basudevpur situated near an airstrip constructed by American soldiers during the war years. Their

activities had driven the people into the jungle although they continued to cultivate their fields. After the war they returned and rebuilt their houses. The village was composed of two distinct groups of people; the Brahmins whose fore-fathers migrated here from further east two to three generations ago, and members of the Hahatto tribe who came from the west.

We were received by a lively group of men, among them Anil Kumar Arya, the son of one of the more well-to-do farmers on whose initiative a centre had been set up. He had come in contact with the Gramdan workers and, attracted by Gandhian ideals and Gramdan, had with their help converted one of his buildings into a library and community centre.

We were given a meal in his father's well-constructed house and afterwards I was taken upstairs to rest. The women of the household gathered round the head end of the string bed fanning hot air across my face and chattering to me and among themselves like a flock of sparrows. A little further back crouched the children, now and then bursting into uncontrollable giggles at our attempt at communication. The women's friendliness, their unconcealed curiosity and amusement offset any desire I might have had for rest. In any case there was a lot to watch, for one by one the women disappeared around corners to don their best saris for the meeting of the village council at the community centre.

The small L-shaped building was crowded. The men sat at one end facing me, and the women on my right. This is one of the busiest agricultural seasons, and many of the farm labourers were returning to the fields instead of joining the meeting. The men told me about the changes that have taken place since 1947. Even before the declaration of Gramdan a primary school was started in the village, a secondary school half a mile away, a post office began to function four miles away, roads were built, but the nearest hospital was at Midnapore, a distance of 15 miles, and people died for lack of medical attention.

Here as in the case of Khemoshuli most of the seventy-five acres of land was in the hands of absentee landlords and only fifteen acres belonged to the people living in the village. Aid from War-on-Want helped to start an agricultural loan fund

for the distribution of improved seed and chemical fertiliser; also a grain store. Both are administered by the village council. Experiments in co-operative farming are going on. Already yields of paddy have considerably increased. Irrigation is again a major problem. There are underground streams but without pump sets the water cannot be utilized. A village level worker from the block office explained that only four pumps were available annually for the whole block, and none were left.

Shortage of land, lack of irrigation facilities—what possible advantage can Gramdan bring in these circumstances? Jyoti Patra knew from personal experience. He owns two acres of land. Heavy debts, the curse of every impoverished small landowner, left him no choice but to sell one acre to satisfy the moneylenders. The village council stepped in and decided to give him a loan to repay his debt. If he cannot repay this loan to the village council his land will go to the village community and not be sold to an outsider, further reducing the already scarce acres belonging to the village. Jyoti Patra was in no doubt that once clear of the moneylenders' debt and its exorbitant interest rate, with improved seeds and fertilisers, he will have no difficulty in repaying the loan. He was smiling happily as he told his story. For him at least, Gramdan had become a reality.

The women had formed themselves into a Mahila Samiti, a women's society. They answered readily when I asked them what changes Gramdan had brought to them. 'We have a paddy store for distribution in time of shortage', they said. 'We have a spinning centre with half a dozen six-spindle wheels and ten simple box wheels, and our spun yarn is given in exchange for cloth.' For the future they wanted a hospital, a girls' school, and a post-office within easy reach of the village—in that order of priority. The demand for a post-office, no doubt, was the result of a 50% literacy rate in the village, an achievement since the declaration of Gramdan and the introduction of the library. Outsiders too avail themselves of the library and pay a small subscription fee.

The visit to Basudevpur gave me a first inkling of 'applied Gramdan'. Much of its limited achievements were due to Anil Kumar Arya, a farmer, a villager and a natural leader, a catalyst

motivating the villagers from within. But if the villagers both at Khemushuli and at Basudevpur had understood their commitment in signing the Gramdan declaration, they had not realised the significance of being part of a movement and the strength and bargaining power it provided for them. They did not know that they were no longer individuals or groups, or just a village, alone in the struggle for survival, but part of all the Gramdan villages in the block, the district, the state.

It had been a good day and a dry day and thus encouraged Robin felt we could take the risk of venturing into the interior again next day. We made an early start and drove for two hours or more until we reached a point from where a track led to the village of Tilantapura and the Sarvodaya Centre. We were met by a couple of workers and a bullock cart. 'Get in', I was told. I did, and together with Robin squatted on the rug and cushions thoughtful friends had provided. A fine drizzle was spraying the countryside alternating with heavy downpours and sudden breaks in the clouds when the sun pierced through for a few moments with dazzling blinding flashes. My view through the opening in front was obstructed by the heavy rumps of the labouring beasts, at the back by the flapping tarpaulin. For nearly two and a half miles we plodded through mud, water and more mud, through jungle and clearings of paddy fields. Men carrying plastic sheeted loads on their heads and umbrellas, school-going children with books clutched tightly to their skinny bodies, and stray animals jumped into focus like gargoyles from a mist-shrouded cathedral.

Suddenly after nearly two hours the buildings of the Sarvodaya Centre rose like a mirage out of the rain-drenched greyness; an imaginative institute created by the villagers for the villagers, financed from various sources and a credit to Pulim Mahapatra, its secretary and inspiring leader. Like Anil Kumar Arya at Basudevpur, he too was a son of the village, but unlike him he had become a worker who had received training in various institutions and was recalled by the people of Tilantapura to set up a centre. This he had done with zeal and devotion, developing an institution in the midst of nowhere. His staff represent a sprinkling from Gramdan and non-Gramdan villages.

There is first Pulim Mahapatra's elder brother, a lover of folk-song, who had been the leader of the song group accompanying Vinoba on his walk through the villages. A younger brother of Pulim's received his education at the Abhoy Ashram. Later he took a bee-keeping course under government auspices, and now works as the Khadi manager. He too had joined Vinoba on his march. Another staff member belonging to this village formed the boys into a club, cleaned up the village tanks, built a house with their help and developed craft activities for them. The secretary of the village council was the instructor in multi-spindle spinning. The librarian too had been a member of Vinoba's song group. The present weaver in Khadi had been a silk weaver until the time of partition, when silk supplies from East Bengal ceased. The head teacher of the institute school came from a neighbouring non-Gramdan village. He explained that there were too many well-to-do families in his village to agree to Gramdan, that their sons went to college and became communist sympathisers, which presented them with a disturbing problem. Another supported this point of view. He lived in a different police district some eight miles away. 'Rich people and communists obstruct any work we are trying to do among the eight hundred inhabitants of my village', he declared. 'The movement is not spreading, there is not sufficient propaganda.' another interrupted. 'There are not enough workers to form song groups and arouse the villagers' interest. If rich people understand what Gramdan is about they come forward. Here in our own village the secretary of the village council persuaded his father, a wealthy man, to join. I would like to see one worker placed in every village after the song group has been there, to take up constructive work. Then we'd soon see results,' he ended emphatically.

All through the day the drizzle and cloudbursts continued, and it was impossible to reach any of the villages. The countryside remained mysteriously hidden behind cloud and mist. Before my eyes raindrops spun cobwebs of finest filigree, glistening like silver and diamonds in the swiftly changing density of light and shade. Beyond, the paddy fields looked starved of every kind of input.

But the day was not wasted for I had learned much about the



workings of this institution which was functioning with efficiency, where every place that I entered looked clean and cared for. If villagers with training can build up such an institution, why can they not apply the same methods towards improving living conditions in the villages and bring about the social change they all talk about without concentrating all their efforts into one limited area of operation?

As we were bumping along once more in the bullock cart, this time without cushions and blankets which had got wet, I felt that I had left behind me an ivory tower. Sentences repeated themselves in my mind. 'We need workers in each Gramdan village for follow-up work', the staff had cried. 'We need irrigation, we need tools, we need seeds and fertilisers, we need better medical facilities', had cried the villagers.

Workers tied to their work in institutions! Villagers knowing what they wanted without the means and knowledge to come anywhere near fulfilling their aspirations! Where was the response to the urgency I felt so deeply? Had the workers got their priorities right? Could the Sarvodaya movement afford the luxury of institutions whose extension work into the villages could by the nature of their activities only be marginal, when a sound agricultural development programme was so urgently needed?

The complexity of Gramdan, of social change and economic development, was befogging my mind as if reflecting the grey mistiness which was wrapping itself around me as night fell. The hurricane lamp, bouncing on the shaft of the bullock cart, threw a faint beam into the dancing shadows as if projecting dim and half-realised answers from my sub-conscious self. As week followed week and stretched into months, this sense of groping was intensified by each new encounter with villagers and workers.

But for the moment we had reached the main road and the jeep took us swiftly back to the Abhoy Ashram.

I was seen off at Kharagpur station on the following day. Robin and his colleagues gave me a rousing fare-well, and when the train steamed out of the station I knew I was leaving friends behind I would want to meet again.

The transition from rural simplicity to westernised urban

living in Calcutta was helped by a game of scrabble with an Indian couple just returned from Canada via Europe and traveling in the same coach with me. For in Calcutta I was stopping with British friends. My brief stay with them brought out more vividly than anything else the cultural difference and economic gap that exist between the affluent and developing nations, and between the affluent westernised Indian society and the impoverished masses.

My concern at the lack of agricultural development in the Gramdan villages which I had just visited was so strong that I followed up an introduction to the managing director of an engineering firm, interested in intermediate technology. I discussed with him and a British member of the Chamber of Commerce the question of using surplus agricultural machinery, and the possibility of business firms providing such machinery on deferred terms to the villagers. They told me, it was true that due to the recession machinery was stock-piling, that anything could be bought or taken up under some loan arrangement but, and here was the snag, firms would not want to take the risk unless they were in charge of operations. This would be entirely contrary to the Gramdan policy of self-help, of moving step by step at the people's own pace and at their own initiative. We talked at length about Gramdan and I found them to be interested and sympathetic listeners. But when the conversation turned to economics I found myself out of my depth. I could not hold my own against coldly reasoning business minds who dismissed Gramdan as Utopian and unpractical without giving it the benefit of the doubt, which was all that I asked for. I felt a fool and, what was worse, realised that if I, as an objective observer, could not persuade these men that there was business in Gramdan if only they would take a risk, the workers would fare no better in a like situation. I wrote to Kshitish Roy Choudhury to come to Calcutta during my next stop-over for another talk. Perhaps he would succeed where I had failed.

Before setting off on the next lap of my tour I bought a hand mirror, a most necessary item, for neither at the Abhoy Ashram, nor at any other place at which I was to stay during the next few months was there ever one provided, and my pocket mirror proved highly inadequate. Yet the workers, both men and

women, were always immaculately turned out. The point about the mirror simply underlined the difference of our essential needs. The workers, particularly the women, did of course use mirrors, even if only the cracked splinter of one, but if there was none they could do without—and so did I on many an occasion later on.

I left for Jamui in Bihar on the overnight train. On waking with the first day light I was struck by the marked change in the scenery. Whatever the amount of rain in West Bengal, whether sufficient or not to avoid droughts later in the year, one has a sense of freshness, of almost voluptuous greenness, a bursting forth into new growth everywhere. In Bihar too the monsoon brought new growth but here pastel shades prevailed as against the vivid jewel colours of Bengal. The fields and wastelands were overlaid by mellowness and softly blended hues as if afraid that any brash and garish show might tempt renewed calamities to overtake the countryside. Not so in West Bengal, where the fierce and violent moods of the people were matched by the bursting vitality of nature.

Some half dozen khadi-clad figures met me at Jamui station and piled into the back of the jeep, a vintage one, held together by straps and string. Conversation was well nigh impossible. The engine roared and spluttered and my companions' English was only basic.

The language problem was of course ever present, but even if I knew more Hindi it would not help in non-Hindi speaking areas, for the difficulty was not so much a lack of English vocabulary as lack of communication on the same intellectual level. It often took a day or more before I would reach a point of understanding with my travel companion and interpreter. I had to get to know the man before I could reach his mind and tongue. A fascinating study in itself but likely to become irksome and frustrating when time was limited. A moment's impatience could undo hours of laboriously built up mutual confidence, a lesson which I had to learn again and again to my

utter shame.

My immediate impression on reaching Khadigram, a few miles' drive from Jamui, was its spartan appearance. The buildings were there but the institutional atmosphere which I had come to expect was absent, for Ramamurti, in charge at Khadigram, has latterly concentrated all his energies on outreach into the villages and deliberately dismantled the traditional ashram activities. He was firmly convinced that social change could only be brought about in the villages and not by bringing a few villagers to an institution.

I was to meet a great many outstanding personalities in the movement but will always consider Ramamurti, a one-time University History Professor, one of the finest brains among them. He is a natural leader of men, attracting disciples rather than followers. We had long discussions regarding priorities of development. At that stage I would not agree that social change was necessary before economic development could bear fruit. How, I argued, can you expect people to accept social change when all they can think about is food? We also talked about family planning, a controversial subject in Sarvodaya circles. Their attitude can only be described as that of the Catholic Church. How, I argued again, can you expect people whose basic need for food is so great that they cannot look beyond it, to exercise a self-control over biological functions which tax man's will power to the highest degree. Far too many Sarvodaya workers preach the gospel of self-denial after having established large families themselves, after having reached an age when self-imposed celibacy has become one of the lesser sacrifices.

This tug of war on vital subjects proved stimulating to us all, particularly to the workers who came to listen.

My few days at the Abhoy Ashram had been exciting, for in spite of its simplicity it had an overlay of sophistication, mainly due to the Bengali temperament. At Khadigram simplicity was more marked; and in the absence of any sophistication one was left with a sense of almost puritanical devotion and unobtrusive kindness. I had no small self-contained guest-house but was given a bed in a large hall, used as a dormitory during work camps and meetings. The day before I arrived at Khadigram an intruder had knifed one of the workers while asleep outside his

quarters. When Ramamurti asked me if I minded if Karuna were to sleep with me as her parents were rather cramped in their house, I knew that he was thinking about last night's incident and didn't want me to sleep alone. Karuna was the charming young daughter of Shri Narayan. She was a social worker in a village near Benares, and home on a few days' leave. I asked her father what had made him join the group at Khadigram. 'I was in business in a town in north Bihar', he told me. 'Over the years I became more and more concerned about the dishonest business methods I was forced to adopt if I was to succeed in my trade. I was caught in a way of life from which I could only escape by breaking away entirely. It was a hard decision to make for it involved my wife and children. I gradually gained their support. Today, I am an honest man and a happy one. I am poor but I am leading an honest life.'

On the first afternoon we set off on foot to visit the village of Bhoodanpur, a walk of about two miles. 'I am taking you to this place', Ramamurti informed me, 'to show you the negative side of giving.' Some twenty-three families have been settled on eighty-five acres of Bhoodan land. Only ten acres have so far been reclaimed—two are under paddy, the rest are producing maize and pulses. The one well dries up during the summer months and the villagers fetch their water from another well three-quarters of a mile away.

The village was a depressing sight. The houses in various stages of collapse were built in a circle around a dirty area which could have been cleaned up and utilized. The people were inarticulate and looked unkempt. They are better off, they said, than when they lived as landless labourers in a caste Hindu village, for now they are free from domination and exploitation. But having been given initial help they have since sat back on their haunches waiting for more help to come. Up to a point they knew what they wanted—to repair their houses and deepen the well, but they do nothing about either. They never leave the village except to go to the nearest bazaar now and then to purchase spices, oil, kerosene and clothes. They have no contact with neighbouring villages. There is no attempt at doing anything for themselves, no incentive, and I wondered if it was due to a policy which resettled Harijans in a way that increased

rather than solved the social problem of caste isolation.

Early on the following morning we left for the Jhajha district. Ramamurti could not accompany me, and Hemnath Singh and Paras Bhai came with me. 'Do you mind if we stop at this village?' Hemnath asked me. 'Paras Bhai has recently been involved in an accident and injured his neck. He is being given treatment here.' We halted outside a neat looking mud-hut. Paras Bhai did not enter as I had expected but walked away across the fields. I watched him disappear in the distance until he stopped to talk to, a peasant who was ploughing with his team of bullocks. A conversation with much gesticulation followed until eventually both of them turned and came walking back to join a group of people who had gathered under a nearby tree. Paras Bhai now took off his shirt and in full view of us all the farmer proceeded to give him his treatment. 'Who is he?' I asked Hemnath. It seemed that the art of bone-setting, manipulation and massage had been handed down from father to son for generations. The shade under the spreading branches of the tree was good enough for a clinic. The onlookers turned out to be patients who had come from near and distant villages.

We reached Simultala at lunch time, a small town situated in an area of lost splendour. More than five hundred old style bungalows were dotted around the countryside. They varied in size as much as in their state of disrepair, presenting a sad picture of slow decay. A once flourishing summer holiday resort for West Bengal was slowly succumbing to the feckless neglect of the present owners. Gardens showed the remains of well-laid-out flower-beds and colourful shrubs but were now an overgrown wilderness among crumbling walls and broken gates.

Bangama nearby was a pleasant small village which had declared Gramdan only last year, because the forty families, made up of nine different castes, had wanted 'co-operation and unity'. As elsewhere here too irrigation and adequate water supply were the main problems. Every well, except one, dries up during the summer months and only high-caste women were allowed by tradition to draw water from it. The other women walked two miles to fetch their daily supply from a well in another village. Since the declaration of Gramdan no such division exists any longer. All the women of whatever caste, fill

their vessels from the same well, a tremendous breakthrough in social change, a sound beginning on which to build development. Men and women surrounded me and told me of their hopes for the future and of their difficulties. The men contradicted one another and corrected one another's statements without rancour. They were a happy group of people, capable of spontaneous actions as when one of the younger men thrust a posy of flowers into my hands with the gesture reminiscent of a French cavalier.

How different was Telwabazaar, a large bazaar village as the name indicates, with a population of five thousand people. It seemed that most of them crowded around us as the jeep pulled up outside some prosperous looking houses, the kind one usually associates with small towns. Only the temple was large enough to hold a fraction of the crowd who wanted to come to our meeting. We proceeded there being pushed through its hallowed portals rather than entering sedately as would have been fitting. The ability of an Indian crowd to squeeze into limited space, taking up no more room to squat on than the size of a postage stamp needs to be seen to be believed. All ventilation was blocked by bodies pressing into every opening. The air was heavy with humidity and settled on us like a thick blanket, now and then limply flapping at the edges with a sudden movement of the crowd.

The main speaker at the meeting, a political worker, was supported by a number of men in all that he had to say, which was plenty. There didn't seem a problem that they could not settle themselves. Although the requisite number of signatures for the declaration of Gramdan had only just been collected, these men knew all the answers. Telwabazaar is a rich village where 10% own twenty to twenty-five acres each, sixty per cent five to ten acres, and where most of the thirty per cent of landless make an adequate living as stall-keepers in the bazaar. The men were planning to form the village council immediately. They would then work out a scheme for land redistribution. They needed irrigation facilities, implements, tractors, chemical fertilisers, compost, insecticides, improved seeds. It all came out so pat, it was all so slick, so much geared to impress me that I felt uneasy and said very little. The men too, in spite of



their lively conversation, were guarded and watchful. Yet they were friendly and hospitable, offering tea and biscuits. How they managed to get it to us without pouring the hot liquid over the bodies of the crowd which surrounded us like a solid wall, I shall never know. But then, the ability of coping in such situations is a typically Indian accomplishment.

When we left the temple the political worker drew me aside and whispered into my ear: 'Will you let me have pounds, I can give you any amount of rupees, I am a rich man, a very rich man, and I want to go to England.' What an opportunist, I thought. When I met him first he had taken me for an American!

Hitherto I had been concerned that mostly haye-nots were joining Gramdan. At Telwabazaar the rich were joining hands with the poor but the power of the upper class made itself strongly felt. I was worried by what I had witnessed. I felt that unless the follow-up work was undertaken by someone intellectually matched to the political worker and his friends, Gramdan might develop on undesirable lines. I was anxious to discuss this with Ramamurti in the evening but our old and battered jeep thought otherwise and limped into Khadigram at such a later hour that we were received with cries of 'What happened?' and packed off to bed.

After a quick last session with Ramamurti early next morning I said good-bye to the people at Khadigram, and with Hemnath Singh and Karuna's father Narayan left for the Monghyr district. We had coaxed the jeep on to the road with cajoling and stroking as if she were a tired old horse. I don't know what happened later but while I was riding in her she plodded on, nursed and tended by the driver, an ex-army man who had obviously been used to 'British memsahibs'. We developed an efficient technique of switching feet on the accelerator each time he started the engine with the cranking handle and much sweat. There wasn't a whisper of life in the battery.

Yesterday we had driven through an extraordinarily beautiful area of strange rock formations and desert-like wasteland, dry and barren in spite of the monsoon. Today we faced the devastation of floods. The Ganges had overflowed its banks and as far as the eye could reach villages and crops were submerged. Boats, trees and housetops bobbed on the swirling waters like

corks, and along the roadside the people were camping among a few sodden belongings. The men were pulling up sugarcane from under the water in an attempt to salvage as much as they could. They knew what they had to do and did it with a resignation bred over years of disaster following disaster. Only for these men and women the annual floods were no longer a disaster, they had become part of a routine, its only variation being the degree of severity. The floods after all were a mixed blessing. The damage they caused was made good a hundred-fold by the fertile silt the waters left behind when they reteded, and the richness of the next harvest made, up to some extent for the previous loss.

So Nath Bihar Sharma told us when we arrived at Mansi, and sat together with him and his sons. He is one of the wealthiest men in this large village with a population of 12,000. Only 150 families are landowners and of those 10% have holdings of up to 400 acres whereas 50% have holdings of less than one acre. Many of the landless at Mansi are employed on the railway.

The villagers decided for Gramdan in 1966 and soon afterwards the 900 households formed several village councils, covering the ten or eleven small hamlets which together with the main village make up Mansi. The main problem is that of irrigation and flood control, and the fragmentation of land-holdings. But under Gramdan it should be possible to exchange widely spread plots into adjacent units to allow for easier cultivation.

Nath Bihar Sharma is one of those owning 400 acres. He employs fifty men on his land, owns a tractor, and operates a lucrative railway contracting business. What a difference between him and the rich men I had met at Telwabazaar. We discussed Gramdan and its various aspects, the need for using scientific methods and for training men in intermediate technology. 'I have my own workshop and would like to select young men from among the villagers and start a training scheme here', he said as he showed us over his compound. I asked to be introduced to his wife and the women of his household. True to custom the men conduct their business in a separate building, and I being a kind of 'neuter' on these occasions have no

opportunity of meeting the women, for my male interpreters could not possibly enter the women's quarters. Unless we held special meetings, or I was in the company of a woman, contact with women in high caste villages was always difficult.

Shri Sharma's four sons were present throughout our talk. The eldest works in the fields, the three younger ones are at college studying biology, 'maths' and civil engineering respectively. At the beginning of our discussion I had asked them about their future plans. All three intended to seek jobs outside the village, if possible in government service. When we were ready to leave they turned to Shri Narayan. 'Before we heard you talk', they said, 'we had no idea how to develop the village through Gramdan, but from your explanations it seems to us now the only way. Formerly, we were critical because the government is not in favour of Gramdan. Since listening to you we are impressed by the fact that a **people's** organisation can bring pressure to bear on the government to develop villages on Gramdan lines.'

We felt much happier about Mansi than we had done about Telwabazaar, and continued talking about Gramdan and rural development as we drove back to Barauni station. There Hemnath Singh and I said good-bye to Shri Narayan who was returning to Khadigram. The two of us then took the train for Pusa Road where I was to meet Vinoba for the first time.

As we settled in our seats Hemnath pulled out a book and started writing. 'I keep a diary', he explained diffidently. But with a little encouragement he read to me from his pages and later handed me a copy of a previous entry entitled: 'From the pages of the diary of a worker', dated 6.9.67, and quoted here without any alteration:

'I think of the work to be done in the villages. Younger friends (engaged in the work of Gramdan) often say that they will be more effective if some elders are with them. It is just possible that they might be seeing some good in this step. It is also possible that they might be shirking the responsibility of failure, of getting Gramdan on the shoulders of the elders. My experience as yet is that, with the exception of a few, our friends engaged in the Gramdan work bother little

to learn from others, be they elders or anybody else of the workers. What I think is that we should persuade workers in Gramdan to give a part of their earnings for the village society—the gift may be very small, but it should be big enough to make them feel that they are making a sacrifice of their comfort for the village. To me the organisation of the Gram Sabha (village council) is the main thing to enact the above said idea. I cannot make me convinced to the saying that the village people will not listen to suggestions, although as yet I have not been able to organise any Gram Sabha. My mind says that the moment the villagers are convinced of our sincerity to the cause they will begin to abide by our advice. At the present moment they look upon us as rice-soldiers, talkative, superficial and aimlessly roaming in the villages. In this set-up they sense any baselessness in our talk, they totally reject the Gramdan idea together with the workers. The question is why I am not applying myself to the task. I have been impressing upon my young friends to be available to the villagers in the evening, and if necessary to halt at night in the village. This suggestion also brings me to the same point of my staying myself in the village in the night. As yet I have been manufacturing excuses for not doing so. My standing excuse is the building of the house for the members of my family. I have added now two more excuses to it. To my estimation the work of Gramdan has not moved an inch further during the last four months in the Jhajha Block. The root of all suggestions is to apply myself to the work rather than going on suggesting it to others. I stayed tonight at Grambharati, Simultala. Hem-nath Singh'.

. After I had left Khadigram Ramamurti sent me a short outline of his further programme, embodying many points we had so heatedly discussed.

Two blocks were to be taken up for intensive development on Gramdan lines covering a population of just under 200,000. The programme would be worked out with the respective village councils which would be made responsible for implementation in their own areas. For this purpose an intensive training pro-

gramme would have to be taken up on an 'emergency' basis. Things should appear to be moving immediately! The training would have to be two-fold, for it would have to deal with members of the executive committee of the village councils on the one hand, and with the young men to be selected for training by the village councils on the other. The training of the council members would be in village management and planning, mobilisation of human and other resources, implication of village ownership of land, decision-making, conducting of meetings and maintenance of records, the resolving of conflicts, how to deal with government and other agencies, and developing Shanti Sena (peace army) activities. They would be given a deeper understanding of the Sarvodaya and Gramdan principles.

The selected young men would have to be trained in either agricultural development or in some village industry, and would be shown how to organise their work. They would gain experience in group living and working together, and be taught functional and general literacy, how to take part constructively in the peace army activities, and how to maintain hygienic conditions. These young men would then be organised into a regular land army. For initial and speedy training a large number of work camps would have to be organised at village, block and district levels.

In Monghyr, Khadigram would become the centre for experimenting in agriculture and agro-industries, and for studying the problems connected with Gramdan extension work.

I know that within a year many of these schemes had become a reality.

As soon as people knew I would be seeing Vinoba they asked me with tedious persistence what I was going to ask him. 'I am not going to ask him anything', I replied. 'But you must', they said. 'Everyone does. Haven't you any questions, isn't there anything you want to say?' 'How can I know what I want to say or ask until I have met him', I replied. 'Only when his personality has made an impact on me shall I be able to respond, only then shall I know. I want to listen first and perhaps come away without even having said anything!' People shook their heads at me in perplexity.

Hemnath Singh and I arrived late in the evening. On the following morning I met at first Krishnaraj Mehta. He is Vinoba's right-hand man, he is like finespun filigree to Vinoba's pure gold, a man of sensitivity and humility. I didn't appreciate this at first when he asked me: 'Have you got your questionnaire ready?' I wasn't stubborn when I said 'no' to his insistence that it was essential. 'I am not a journalist, or a reporter', I burst out, 'I simply don't know what to ask him'. And this was the truth. Practically every word that Vinoba utters is put into print and available to be read. What could I ask him that hasn't been asked many times before. How should I be able to provoke him into saying anything new? I agreed though to write a short note about myself and let Krishnaraj have this to pass on.

I walked into Vinoba's room at 10.30 a.m. and joined the people who were sitting cross-legged on the floor, along the walls, by themselves, or in groups: the sadhus, and the holy men, the not so holy and the worldly, the groups of women from Assam, the workers from this state and that,—all faces turned towards Vinoba. This was the moment I had been waiting for—

to come face to face with the man who had inspired Bhoodan. And there he sat on the mat in front of his bed, arms resting on a low table, dressed in a white dhoti, his upper body bare and his head wrapped in a green shawl and green deerstalker-like cap to protect his sensitive ears. He looks like Robin Hood, I thought, and felt mirth rising within me instead of awe.

Then his eyes focused on me and I saw their twinkle behind the lenses of his steel-rimmed spectacles. I knew then that he would have laughed with me had he known what I had been thinking.

'So you can't speak and I can't hear', he said referring to his deafness and my lack of Hindi. 'I rarely speak English these days, so how are we going to converse?' Silence. 'What is the universal language?' he asked. This is Vinoba, I thought, what answer would he expect? 'The language of the mind', I faltered. Vinoba only shook his head. 'Esperanto', prompted a voice from the back. I wasn't going to repeat that. 'If I said English', I ventured at last, 'I am sure it will be the wrong answer'. Vinoba simply smiled, lifted his hand and rubbed his tummy. 'The language of hunger', he said.

'So you are a Quaker', he continued to question me. 'What does the term mean?' I explained and he quoted a simile from the ancient Hindu scriptures.

It was now 11 o'clock and time for prayers. Om shanti, shanti, shanti, the voices around me chanted.

My first interview was over. I came away unsure and untouched. I had felt nothing of the 'holy'. I had felt no emotional vibrations. I still had no questions. I was still outside the circle.

After lunch Krishnaraj came to me again. What broke the ice I don't know, but he got me talking about my recent tour in West Bengal and Bihar, about my impressions, my reactions to Gramdan. 'Write down what you told me just now and let Vinobaji see it', he urged me as we parted. So I sat down and this is what I wrote off the cuff and sent along before going to his room once more at 4.30.

'If I use strong words in thinking aloud on paper it is for the sake of causing and provoking reactions and not out of a sense of knowing better. I am here to observe and to learn.

I have welcomed the opportunity of studying Gramdan because I would like to convince myself of its mission, only then can I convince others. The image of India today falls short of all that the world has hoped for and I ask myself, can Gramdan be *the* answer, is it *one* answer? Much of what I have seen and learned since my recent involvement has stirred my imagination. Yet every day I am conscious of the urgency and the time factor. Have we time? How can we use the time to be constructive without destroying existing values? It seems to me that unless social change in the villages is simultaneously accompanied by improved agriculture the time factor will defeat us.

'In each village that I visited I asked the same question. What is your greatest need? And invariably the answer was irrigation. This showed an awareness by the villagers which is heartening. Can we afford to put off material progress until we have established necessary social changes?

'Amongst the workers I have found too many hackneyed answers, too much half knowledge, reactionary tendencies and a lack of urgency. I ask: Are institutions too set in their ways to have the dynamic approach which is needed today? Have we our priorities right? There are in the villages young men today with an alertness and a readiness to be trained—not for white-collar jobs—but in the essentials for the uplift of their own community. Are large work camps effective enough? Are there enough Gramdan workers of the calibre to train and be trained to effect sufficient and sustained development on both levels, i.e. social change and agricultural progress? For a village to be persuaded to declare Gramdan without signs of material and social change within a year must destroy their goodwill.

'I welcome the idea of concentration in areas. It is necessary for India outside the movement and for the world at large to see and know that somewhere Gramdan has succeeded. Only then will it really spread. If it cannot prove itself now, then surely it never will.

'Too often I am told it can't be done. I say: there is no such thing as 'can't' within the movement. I am too often



told: It will be done. I say: 'will be' is not good enough. It must be done now.

'I have visited one large village where rich land-owners have joined in signing the declaration. It was a bazaar village and some of the rich people we talked to were far too clever. They already knew all the answers. I am worried and concerned that unless highly intelligent Gramdan workers are seeing to the follow-up things may go wrong.

'I realise the immensity of the problem and the task before the movement. When talking to workers and villagers I show no doubt but wish to instill into everyone the faith that is necessary to activate the people.

'Of you I ask: Can we, with our human failings and limitations, bring about the change in time?'

When I walked into Vinoba's room the scene was almost the same as in the morning, except that Vinoba was lying on his bed. He was reading my note. Everyone sat quietly waiting. In attendance to Vinoba's every needs were as always Tai and the two young disciples. And as I watched them now and during the next two days I wondered what their destiny would be one day. Tai would be all right. She had lived long enough to have memories, enough experience to sustain her. But the two young men? What was to become of them, whither would they go?

It was 5 o'clock. In the large hall the people were gathered to celebrate Dhirendra Mazumdar's 69th birthday. Vinoba with the two young men on either side, with Tai and the rest of us following, walked along to join the others in the hall. Vinoba addressed them. He talked about the need for Gramdan to succeed now, within the next four years if it was to succeed at all. And he referred to the woman from England who felt the urgency so strongly, and he quoted from my note.

He went on to say that the Gram Sabha, the village council, was the most important institution in a Gramdan village and needed to concern itself immediately on coming into being with 5 functions:

1. There should be frequent meetings of the village council and discussions. •
2. The village should be cleaned up and kept clean.

3. The people should be saved from the misery caused by drunkenness.
4. The village council should act as a people's court to settle disputes, and finally.
5. It should shoulder responsibility for all that happened in the village.

To the Khadi workers he said that unless Khadi became village oriented it was not going to strike roots and would not be supported by the villagers.

Next day was Vinoba's 72nd birthday. People came from far and wide to pay homage to him, they touched his feet, they garlanded him, they offered him the records of the Gramdans which they had collected in the different states. Vinoba sat quietly throughout the celebrations. He accepted the gifts. He smiled. He never spoke all that day but his presence could be felt. There was no withdrawal in his silence, rather a giving out of strength and serenity, of strands of communication going out from him in many directions.

The following day was my last. So far nothing spectacular had happened to me. I didn't even know if I had expected anything to happen, and if so what. Yet during the past 48 hours my consciousness had been heightened, my awareness sharpened. No profound questions or answers had been exchanged, and already it was time for me to say goodbye.

I slipped into the room quietly and sat down amongst the others. As I watched Vinoba I realised how tired he had been and how much fresher he was today. His strong voice had been a surprise from the first. But today his face had lost some of its pallor, and his gestures were more decisive. I caught fragments of what he said to those who had come to him.

'They were burning 72 candles in honour of my birthday', he said, and drummed the low table in front of him in the way he has, to emphasize what he wants to convey. 'What waste for a poor country when the sun is shedding his light. We are the candles we should burn, we must burn ourselves in work.'

'Do you know what is going on in China?' he addressed some other group, 'Ten million one hundred and seventy thousand heads were cut off during the revolution, and communes were formed. Now again during the cultural revolution more

heads are being cut off. The land that belonged to individuals was made the property of the state. Land should always belong to the individual but be worked for the benefit of the community. Under Gramdan the land continues to be held by the individual but the ownership is in the hands of the village community. The present struggle in certain areas (he was obviously thinking of Naxalbari) is between these two different concepts of land ownership.'

Krishnaraj beckoned me to the front. 'Have you any last questions,' he asked me. 'No', I said once again. 'But has Vinobaji any message for me?'

Vinoba looked at me for a while, then he spoke. 'As I said yesterday, India is a big country, as big as Europe without Russia. Shall I show you the map of Europe?' 'No', I replied, 'I have it in my head', to which reply everyone laughed. 'India has many problems', he continued. 'See what is going on in Europe even today. Take the chimney of glass of a hurricane lamp and drop it on the floor. There you have the map of Europe, a hundred pieces scattered here and there. Uniting together all the scattered pieces is not an easy job. But that is what Gramdan is trying to do—to unite people. In the movement, in bringing about change the time factor is no doubt important, but sometimes you have to wait for the result. Do you know Milton?' he asked and quoted: 'They also serve who only stand and wait'.

Two days before when speaking to five hundred people in the big hall Vinoba had stressed the need for urgency, had even quoted my own sense of this. But today his message to me was 'patience'. So I asked: 'Are you telling me not to press for quick results?' He did not answer this directly, but asked: 'Do you know the formula for water,  $H_2O$ , two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen? I give you another formula: M.A. Do you know what it means?' I shook my head. 'Two parts meditation, one part action. Meditation, thought, must come first, double in proportion to action. You know the proverb 'Look before you leap' I say, 'Think before you act'.

Then side-tracked for a moment he asked me for the second time: 'Have you been to Assam yet?' But reverted again to the subject on hand 'Do you know the difference between humanity

and spirituality?' 'No', I answered, 'You tell me'. So he said: 'Christ taught you, love thy neighbour as thyself. Love thy neighbour, that is humanity, love thyself stands for spirituality. When giving the world this message Christ bridged the gulf between the two'.

It was time for Vinoba's parting words: 'Mujhe bari khushi hui kih ap mujhse mile ain', (I am very happy to have met you) to which I replied: 'Mujhe bhi khushi hai'. (I too am happy.)

In the afternoon I said goodbye to Krishnaraj and to Tai. I was gladdened by their warmth and request to return, and touched by Tai's final gesture when she pressed a small bag of Indian sweetmeats into my hands for the journey.

As the train sped through the night towards Calcutta I tried to crystallize my impressions. At no time had I felt emotional or caught up in other-worldliness, and for that I was grateful, for I would have mistrusted any such reaction. Vinoba's warning to me: 'Think twice before you act' could not have been more to the point. That I was to meet a saint I had known before. Now I had met the man also. The picture was complete. It glowed with shadow and light, with brilliance and subdued tones of mellow gentleness. It had power and strength that stretched from many yesterdays into the future. It sparkled with gaiety and laughter, and revealed the hand of the master.

My Orissa programme was an ambitious one and strewn with difficulties not experienced previously, as too much had been packed into the available time. Lack of transport and badly connecting bus and train times made it almost impossible to adhere to the prescribed schedule. Those responsible for the execution of the programme tried too rigidly to adhere to it, they discussed the pros and cons amongst themselves in a language I could not understand, without sufficient consultation with me which would have involved me, instead of making me feel like a parcel that was being handed around. This caused friction and tensions but it also taught me how to avoid such situations in the future. After all there is no harm in being a 'parcel' and leaving the responsibility for safe delivery to others as long as I was able to carry out my assignment. And this of course was the problem. The local workers quite naturally wanted to impress me by what had been achieved and take me to 'show places', whereas I was interested in seeing and understanding the situation as it really was. This meant penetrating below the surface. It also involved the difficulty of communicating to the workers my deeper and wider interest in Gramdan which they did not expect from casual and foreign visitors with whom they were used to dealing. Yet in spite of all this my days in Orissa were constructive and I saw and learnt a great deal more than I might have done had my programme been less exacting. With private transport at my disposal I would never have understood how much the lack of easy means of communication can interfere with good intentions, nor would my experiences have been on so many different levels.

The train from Calcutta took me to Berhampur, a pleasant

small town. I was met by Rushi Behera, one of the most senior workers in Orissa, a simple man, born and bred in a village, with a simple faith in Gandhian ideals, conscious of his responsibilities both towards his work and his family. He knew a fair amount of English but when I met him he was badly out of practice, and communication was at first beset with difficulties. But gradually conversation became easier and Rushi Behera looked after me in a wonderful way. When I developed a heavy cold he provided hot footbaths and gargles. No one could have cared more for my physical well-being. And I was no easy charge for many of the frictions and tensions, and my own frustration and impatience at the disorganised situation, rubbed undeservedly off on him.

He took me from the station to a government rest house where I had a bath and was then given some food, while Rushi Behera tried to explain to me that Malati Choudhury had gone looking for a jeep and would soon be with me. I had been told I should meet her but no one had thought it necessary to explain to me who she was. Having met Manmohan Choudhury, the chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh, at Benares, I assumed her to be his wife and expected a woman in her thirties. Malati Choudhury arrived about 5 o'clock, wet, drenched, windblown with flying hair and crumpled sari, full of apologies for being so long. She collapsed into a chair and without a break in her flow of English explained the difficulties about borrowing a jeep, blaming Manmohan for drawing up an impossible programme. 'Are you his wife?' I broke in eventually. She gurgled with amusement. She was in fact his aunt and the wife of Naba-krishna Choudhury, one time Chief Minister of Orissa. She was also Uttara's mother, Uttara who had married Narayan Desai, the Secretary of the Shanti Sena (peace army) and son of Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's trusted secretary. We had known Narayan for a number of years and I soon established an easy relationship with Uttara. Now I was meeting her mother. 'Let's have tea while we wait for a jeep to turn up', she said at last. 'If the jeep doesn't come I don't know what we are going to do. It is getting late and we have several hours on the road. I did so want you to see the beautiful scenery during the drive. I don't know where I am going to put you for the night. I wanted

to make arrangements where you would be comfortable. Now this won't be possible. Can you stay in a village?' 'Of course I can', I replied. 'But there won't be a proper latrine, what will you do?' I had quite a job to assure her that I was used to camping and that all I needed was privacy while attending to nature's demands.

When the jeep arrived at 7 o'clock, I was glad for Malati's sake. It was still raining hard, but by the time we stopped at a small wayside bazaar for a meal the clouds had broken and soon afterwards a brilliant moon lit up woods and hills as we wound our way upwards to about 3000 feet into the mountainous region of the Ganjam district. The scented night air was gradually getting cooler. Hares and jackals scuttled across the road in the beam of our headlights. 'This is where I always look for tigers', Malati suddenly burst out. 'I have often met them in these woods. Oh, I do hope we see one now, I so want to show you!' From then onwards I expected a tiger to jump into my lap at every moment. Conversation with Malati is difficult at the best of times for her vivid mind jumps from topic to topic in the same way that she rushes from job to job. But what did it matter. Much to Malati's disappointment we reached the village of Abarsing without any further adventure, or meeting tigers. One of the workers lived there with his wife and children. We spent the night in his house, and I woke to the freshness of the mountain air and the sun rising above the hills.

Bit by bit I had pieced together some background history of the Ganjam and Koraput districts from Malati's answers to my questions on the way up. Both these districts among others belonged to the 'partially excluded areas' under British rule. The peculiar administrative set-up lent itself to exploitation of the tribals. They were gradually dispossessed, held in serfdom and driven further and further into the hills. After Independence Tribal Welfare activities were started, but for the tribal any one wearing clean white clothes was synonymous with government officials or wealthy exploiters, and not to be trusted. They shied away from those wishing to help them. The first worker who came to live at the village of Tuman Langia in his clean white shirt and dhoti could not establish contact with the villagers. What was he to do? He placed his string bed into an open space

in the middle of the village, and in true Gandhian tradition began a fast. The villagers watched from a distance. Seven days passed. The worker was by now weak and running a temperature. They approached him one by one, at first timidly, then more courageously. This poor wretch of a man, they thought, could not possibly do them any harm. Perhaps he meant what he had told them? Could they really trust him? It seems they did, because together they built his house. Gradually constructive work began.

This illustrates how much preliminary work has to go into rehabilitation before there can be any social change or economic improvement.

Before I had finished dressing, the village headman and men of the village council came to pay their respects to Malati, at least this is what I believed. 'They have come to see you', she explained. We squatted on the narrow verandah. From where I sat I looked at green fields, at a few huts tucked among them, and beyond at the wooded hills. It was still cool and wonderfully peaceful. I just wanted to sit and gaze and fill my eyes with the beauty of the landscape.

I suppose the two hundred people of Abarsing no longer notice their surroundings. They belong to the Suddha-Saora tribe who for decades have known nothing but privation and hardship. Gramdan at least offered some hope for change. So in 1956 they signed the declaration with thumbprints for all the adults were then illiterate. 'Up to 1956', Balna Padhan, the headman, explained, 'we all went after our own affairs. Since then we live as a community, and discuss our problems with one another. We have distributed the land. Illegal taxes have gone and so have the moneylenders'. In 1964, when under the Freedom from Hunger Campaign War-on-Want money paid for labour at Rs. 1.50 per day per man, they started constructing a tank, built a sluice for irrigation purposes, and terraced some land. People who are so impoverished that they must find paid jobs to be able to eat cannot give free labour at this stage of development. It took two years to complete the work. Since then they have grown two crops annually, and harvested better and heavier yields of paddy, pulses, ragi and vegetables, some of which is sold in the bazaar for cash.



Next year the villagers hope to grow cotton. Men and women will be trained in multi-spindle spinning, aided by the Khādi Commission. The programme aims at setting up an industry in ten villages with one hundred multi-spindles. Six bee-hives, producing fifteen pounds of honey annually, have also been set up by the Khadi Commission. The honey is sold in the local bazaar.

Palmyra palm trees grow naturally in this district. The date is not edible, and the villagers were in the habit of making intoxicating drinks from the sap. With the introduction of the palm gur industry the sap has become too valuable to be used for toddy. Eight years ago the two hundred Palmyra palm trees belonging to individual villagers were handed over to Purna and his family. During the season, September to February, he produces gur, the unrefined sugar, in the shape of bricks, small cakes and liquid. Half the gur he gives back to the tree owners, the rest he sells in the market for roughly Rs. 400. Of this he keeps Rs. 200, and Rs. 200 go to the village fund. The local market value of palm gur just then was Re. 1 per kilo as against Rs. 2 per kilo of cane gur.

Twelve years ago a primary school was started under the government tribal welfare programme, and thirty boys and ten girls are supposed to be attending classes. But when I visited the little building there was only a handful of children sitting on the mud floor. The others had run after their parents into the fields, and neither teachers nor parents seemed inclined to enforce discipline. How hard it is to change existing habits! Yet both teachers and children had tried to make the dilapidated place attractive by creating a small garden. 'We have more food today', the headman complained, 'but we have no higher education'. Even so a few boys have gone to a high school twenty-six miles away where they live in a hostel supported by stipends.

Considering the length of time since the declaration of Gramdan, and the efforts that have been made to effect changes, the appearance of the village was disappointing and the people still very much a backward community. A government village worker and her house set a poor example to the villagers. Both looked exceedingly neglected and untidy. I visited several

houses, talked to the women and watched the babies. I felt pity choking me. 'We need your help', men and women wailed, 'we know nothing, we are poor and ignorant. What can we do by ourselves?' Ten years, I thought. What must have been their plight a decade ago? What up-hill work for the worker who has not been there very long.

At Tuman Langia, the village of the 'fasting worker', two energetic young women are trying to keep things moving. The twenty-four families are also Saora tribals. Here too War-on-Want paid for labour and materials to build a tank, a sluice and a drinking water well. We walked for almost a mile over rough ground and unclaimed land to look at the tank, only to find that the heavy rains had caused a breach, and streams of precious water were pouring away. The women workers had told the men about it in the morning, but they claimed to have important other business to attend to and would see to it next day. I couldn't understand what Rushi Behera and Malati Choudhury said, but I could guess, for within a minute the men were at work.

How to instil the need for immediate action into a backward community which has lived from hand to mouth, without planning, without thought for the morrow for generations, can only be a matter for persevering education. The workers at Tuman Langia tried hard. Only five children go to the nearest primary school, one-and-a-half miles away, but twenty boys between the ages of seven and fourteen are being taught by the two young women at evening classes, their only literacy material the few text books of the five school-going children. Malati has appealed to various government and other sources for funds to buy some basic equipment, but in vain. How can there be progress in the face of such obstacles!

Most tribal villages are tucked away high up in the hills and inaccessible to a visitor with limited time. Fortunately after the declaration of Gramdan half the villagers of Guli had decided to rebuild their houses lower down at a distance of half a mile from the rest of their community, and it took us no more than about twenty or thirty minutes to climb up to Guli when the jeep could go no further. The old and settled part of Guli presented a picturesque sight, but the new part looked more

like a hastily knocked together camp. Twenty-eight out of the forty-four families are Christians. I looked into the Church, a rough structure standing at the beginning of the 'camp' part of the village, entirely empty, just four bare walls. A priest visits Guli once in a while, otherwise the people gather in the building to pray and read extracts from the Bible.

I was told the tale of the tribal priest who was threatened with death by his own people on a charge of witchcraft. Frightened out of his wits he ran for shelter to the house of a Gramdan worker. The agitation died down but not the man's fear. If I become a Christian, he thought, I can no longer be accused of witchcraft. And he asked to see the pastor and became converted.

Unless one knows something about the land problem in India it is hard to understand the difficulties of the landless when there are vast tracks of unclaimed land. Individual villagers too own acres of barren land. Land reclamation is one of the most important programmes in any development scheme whether government or privately sponsored. It is also a very expensive one. A small impoverished land-owner with no tools, bullocks or well, has not the means to cultivate his plot economically, let alone to reclaim a square foot of his barren land.

In almost every village that I visited I was always given two figures, one for land under cultivation and one for land that could be reclaimed. The village of Guli was no exception, for only one-third of the available land was under cultivation, and it was dependent on the monsoon for a fair harvest. The exceptionally well-constructed tank had raised great expectations, but to the utter disappointment of villagers and workers alike the tank had remained empty. They had forgotten that it will take two or three years for the porous soil to silt up sufficiently to retain catchment and rain water, after which time they should have an abundant water supply, for there was also a natural spring trickling into the bottom of the tank. Perhaps they had not listened at the time, perhaps they just hadn't understood what their adviser had told them when he selected the site for them. I didn't find out about these facts until I was miles away. At Guli I was only aware of the men's frustration.

Their despondency could so easily throw them back into the state of apathy from which they had been roused by painstaking efforts.

In contrast to Guli the people of Akili had succeeded in building a tank of vast dimensions, capable of irrigating fifty acres. As I stood and looked at the well-soaked fields, remembering that even during last year's drought there had been enough water in the unfinished tank to provide the villagers with six months food, I thought of the groups in England who with their large or small financial contributions had made this possible. And I told the lively and go-ahead villagers something about it, and challenged them that from now on it was up to them. They had been given a lever from outside, but all future progress would have to come from within, through their own efforts.

This too was a tribal village, but its proximity to the main road and to a bazaar underlined the urgent need for the building of roads to make every village accessible, and to break through the deadening isolation in which thousands of communities find themselves. Unless they have a chance of communicating with the outside world, how can they be expected to progress? Education without the means of communication can only be an isolated half-measure. People will remain backward unless they can establish contact with other more progressive groups. The presence of a worker, an outsider, only emphasizes the situation, for after a while he too feels himself cut off and loses his drive and initiative.

On our return journey to Berhampur we stopped at a large Tibetan agricultural and industrial settlement and visited the carpet weaving centre, supported by Swiss funds. One cannot help but make involuntary and spontaneous comparisons, and I thought how much easier it is to achieve a measure of success within a certain time when the people to be helped are limited in number, the area and its boundaries clearly defined at the outset, the plan conceived and the funds budgeted for and underwritten by interested and sympathetic supporters, when the question of self-help does not enter as a major issue. How much more commendable are the achievements in the tribal villages among people one could equally call refugees of two

hundred years' standing, who, in refugee terms, have become 'camp conditioned' and whose plight is almost unknown to the world, whose rehabilitation rests solely with the Indian Government and Indian voluntary agencies!

Before descending to the plains Malati took me to the tourist bungalow to show me the magnificent view and to give me a taste of water from the hot sulphurous spring. 'If only your programme wasn't so packed', she lamented, 'I would have made you spend a night here and taken you on in the morning'. It was a tempting idea. Malati is no longer young and uses up her energy at a rate that leaves others falling by the wayside. The demands made on her are never ending, and the love she feels for those whom she is trying to help is being amply reciprocated. I knew—for even in this one short day I had ample opportunity to watch people's reaction; to see a young girl weep on her shoulder; a young tribal woman who had married a Gramdan worker belonging to a different tribe and feeling herself a stranger amongst the people of Akili. She had known Malati since she was a child, and was clamouring to be comforted by her as she had been when a small girl.

But it was no good dreaming about a night's rest in these glorious surroundings. Dusk was falling fast. We had a long way to go and a train to catch. As we drove through the darkness I was amazed at seeing so many one-legged men until I realised that when walking they pulled up their dhotis from one leg for easier movement. The bare brown leg merged invisibly with the shadows while the beam of our headlights threw the white-clad other one into strong relief. I chuckled to myself as we bumped along in the darkness.

At Berhampur station I said goodbye to Malati. If I had begged her she would have come with me to Rayagada instead of returning to Angul. May be if she had she would have ironed out many of the misunderstandings and tensions of the next few days. But how could I have done so without putting a further burden on her shoulders, without hurting Rushi Behera in whose charge I was now travelling.

Orissa will always recall for me two contrasting impressions. The one, purely visual, was my constant delight at the beautiful scenery, the lovely countryside of wooded hills and fertile

plains, of vast rivers spanned by newly constructed bridges. These bridges—often stretching for more than two miles across a river-bed,—represent for me one India, the industrial India which can execute engineering feats appealing in design and magnificent in their setting against the silhouette of distant mountains.

But on the other side of the coin there was the India of the outcasts, the tribals, the have-nots. Tired and unwashed Rushi Behera and I got off the stop-go, stop-go passenger train at Srikakulam at 4.30 in the morning. Grey shadows of humanity rose from the pavements of the town, stretched, gathered their limbs together and merged into the dawn for their ablutions. Stray dogs full of sores slunk after them with tails between their legs. We boarded the bus to take us to Rayagada. The seats were occupied by recumbent figures and we brushed them off like stray cats. They too crept away. Now the town woke. Nightsoil, children, animals and garbage poured into the lanes from the gaping darkness of a thousand doors, and with the sun rose the clamour and noise of another day. The bus wound its way through streets and lanes sounding its horn with the persistence of an avenging angel heralding judgement day; or sped along the open road. The fields too came to life, the next village, the bazaars, the whole world became a teeming mass of living wretchedness. Only the birds which soared through the sky were free as if they alone were God's creatures.

As I watched hour after hour, the impact of what I saw crushed me until from my sub-conscious sprang a thought which shocked me more profoundly than anything else had done. 'They are walking on two legs', said a voice within me with surprise. 'They should be on all fours! What are they but beasts of burden, weighed down by the loads on their heads, across their shoulders, trudging through life in a vacuum, conditioned to an existence of drudgery and apathy, with minds as empty as their bellies!'

And hope died within me, to be revived when I reached the villages. Here too mouths are hungry and minds still empty, but here and there are those that have made a start, that are beginning to show a new awareness and new growth, scattering seeds.

There could be no doubt about the changes which have taken place in the various districts of Orissa since Independence. The problem is a two-fold one, for a third of the population in Orissa are tribals. Whatever culture and incentive for progress they may have had, had stagnated for more than two-hundred years. They were gradually exploited, dispossessed, forced into serfdom and driven into the hills by an expanding Hindu society. There can be no integration until they have become restored to some measure of human dignity. Since 1948 the government and a number of voluntary organisations have been involved in intensive work-projects towards this end.

So it was not surprising that Gramdan found favour in a great many tribal villages during Vinoba's first trek through Orissa in 1955, and that the movement was strengthened during his second tour in 1964, when many non-tribal villages declared Gramdan as well. In the Narayanapatra area of the Koraput district which I was now visiting, 769 villages have declared Gramdan and of these 320 had then been legalised under the Gramdan Act, meaning that the title deeds had been transferred from individual ownership to the village council, a tremendous achievement. What this entails can only be understood by anyone familiar with the complicated legal processes involved, the checking and counter-checking of documents, the verifying of gifts made by word of mouth, the duplication of names, the absence of family names, land sub-divided among sons. In fact it involves the whole structure of Indian society in all its complicated peculiarity.

It was lunch-time when we eventually reached Rayagada. We were met by Brindaban Jena, a man of incredible energy, drive and determination, who knew what he wanted to achieve and who used methods towards this end which at times could only be described as 'bullying'. But, he explained, these people have been used to it for so long, without it they would be lost. May be he was right!

Almost as soon as we arrived he and Rushi Behera were discussing the impossibility of adhering to my programme in the time allowed without private transport. We were sitting in a small room, Brindaban's office. He had placed a bed in it—a wooden plank on four legs, the customary alternative to the

string bed, and a table fan. While they were arguing I was repeatedly invited to 'go and take your bath'. The office was the common entrance to the small court yard on to which other rooms opened. People were continuously walking through. I was tired, so tired that all I wanted to do was to take off my crumpled sari which was sticking to me like a mud pack, change into a wrap, lie down and rest before doing anything at all. I stood, despairing at ever being able to make myself clear, at making the two men understand that I was not accustomed to going fully clothed for my bath as Indian women do. Taking one's bath meant entering a small dark room in the opposite corner of the court yard to the latrine. In it was a stone tank filled with water, a bucket and a mug with which to sluice oneself down. Something in me always revolted at the sight of these bath-rooms. I never knew where to put any of my clothes to keep them dry and clean, where to hang the towel, where to keep tooth brush, etc., in fact how to begin. Strangely enough bath-rooms demanded one of the greatest adjustments on my part, for no sooner had I got the hang of what to do in one particular one, than I moved on to a different place and different facilities.

So there I stood, feeling exhausted and exasperated. It was now a question of bursting into tears or getting angry. Unfortunately I got angry, which made things worse. Tension blocked any possible means of communication. But at last a stool was placed in the bath-room. I took my bath Indian style. I was given food at which I could only pick. I lay down on my plank, but felt by now so overwrought that sleep or rest were impossible. And all the time the discussion regarding my programme and how to execute it in the absence of a jeep raged round me. In the end it was decided to cut out one part of the programme altogether.

There was nothing that could be done for the rest of that afternoon, except to visit the next door educational institution which had been set up under one of the tribal welfare organisations. I watched little girls practise traditional tribal dances, saw them engaged in studying, or caring for their clothes, for this was Sunday and a rest day from organised classes.

When later during my tour I visited other educational



institutions I became strongly aware of the contrast between the pupils there and the wild and unkempt youngsters in the tribal villages. Take any boy or girl from these small and backward communities and give them the opportunity for care and schooling, and the transformation proved that the potentialities were there to be tapped.

Two miles outside Rayagada stood a large and modern paper mill. Brindaban obtained the loan of a jeep from the management for a few hours next morning, so that we could visit the Gopalwadi Training Institute at a distance of about ten miles. Madhan Mohan Sahu, a kindly elderly Gandhian worker, received us and served us with refreshments of home-grown fruit, tea and biscuits, in the office building. This stood in a neatly planned garden of symmetrical flower-beds bordered by banana groves and other cultivation. Following Vinoba's visit to the district in 1955, Annasahib Saraswebuddhe, one of the foremost veteran Gandhian constructive-work planners in the movement, undertook intensive development work in Koraput. Gopalwadi was chosen as a centre for the training of local villagers and for the purpose of up-grading cattle.

The Koraput experiment came to a standstill in 1960, mainly due to vested interests and non-cooperation by the Orissa Government. Since then the emphasis of the institute changed to become a training centre for village workers, to introduce them to agro-industries, dairying, agriculture, weaving, oil-processing, bee-keeping, soap-making, and so on. Three groups of thirty and two of twenty-two men each, have been given a two-year training period. The first two months are given over to training in village psychology, followed by four months living in villages. The trainees then return for a month to the institute to be taught how to develop socio-economic processes in the villages. Six months field work follows, then again one month study in planning, and eight months in the field and a final three months' training at the institute.

Madhan Mohan Sahu was a teacher in basic education before getting involved in the Bhoodan movement. Because of his aptitude and interest in agriculture he was appointed principal at Gopalwadi.

Lately the syllabus has been changed and trainees remain

for the whole of the two years at the institute. The first year is devoted to practical work, training in agriculture and different village industries. During the second year the trainees are divided into streams to qualify as agricultural or Khadi and industrial workers. There are four teachers. It was too early to ascertain which system was to be preferred. At the time of my visit no course was in operation.

During our conversation the agricultural instructor told us that during the whole of the training period he had only been once to a village for follow-up work among the students. He was informed that the villagers had gained a new outlook, that they had become interested in village industries, that they wanted to produce food and clothes within the village. He was told nothing about any agricultural development, nor did he enquire or see for himself what was happening. Yet agriculture was supposed to be his subject. When I expressed surprise the principal explained that the institute was financed by the Khadi Commission to the extent of Rs. 70,000 per year and that the emphasis of training was geared towards Khadi rather than towards agriculture. The institute owns 137 acres of land. Over a period of twelve years only a small amount has been reclaimed and brought under cultivation.

If it is agreed that institutional training and a model farm are essential for agro-industrial development in tribal areas, as I have been given to understand, then Gopalwadi with its pleasant and cared-for buildings and large acreage has all the potentials for such a training centre, provided it is given a dynamic leadership with the right supporting personnel and a new directive.

We returned to the paper mill to hand back the jeep and I was shown over the factory, an impressive industrial undertaking. 'Of course, many machines are still semi-mechanical or hand-operated', explained my guide, one of the senior officers, smart, lively and intelligent. 'It would be different in your country', he continued, 'but we are faced with the two problems of high costs for machinery and a vast number of-unemployed!'

It was unfortunate that I should see over this factory immediately after my visit to Gopalwadi, for it brought out strongly the contrast in efficiency and in the ability of executing an essential task competently. It also brought out the uncalled-for

disregard for the contribution of major industries towards Indian economic development by the majority of Gandhian constructive workers. In spite of superficial friendliness between the management of the paper mill and my companions, the latter were anxious to tell me that this was merely to impress me, as on the whole they got little or no help in furthering their objectives. If this is so, isn't there a need for changing this attitude towards mutual trust? The J.K. business empire conducts many charitable projects so that the management's co-operation could become of vital importance to Gopalwadi, particularly as the director of the J.K. Paper Mill and Madhan Sahu are well known to one another and the former spends week-ends in the peaceful surroundings of Gopalwadi.

We were entertained to lunch at the factory guest house, then quickly left for Rayagada to catch the afternoon bus for Pura.

Although the Koraput experiment came to an end in 1960, much of the work continued and in travelling through the countryside one is constantly aware of this, whether through government extension programmes, or government-aided or voluntary efforts. In areas where as yet little development work is going on, a well, or a tank built with War-on-Want funds, has often been the turning point in an otherwise hopeless situation. In the Ganjam district and much more so in the Koraput district War-on-Want aid has been minimal compared with the amount of rupees poured into these areas. Over the years social and economic changes have taken place in many villages, and it would be incorrect to credit War-on-Want with anything more than a contributing factor. Yet it came at a time when it could be effective. In thirty-nine villages out of the sixty for which War-on-Want aid has been asked for, projects have been undertaken. Of these fourteen had been completed at the time of my visit.

We left by the afternoon bus for the Pura centre from which most of the projects in this area of the Koraput district are supervised. It was an enjoyable if somewhat hazardous ride, for the scenery as it unfolded during the winding climb into the hills was beautiful. But there were numerous small mountain streams crossing the road, bridged by narrow concrete slabs of about twenty to thirty yards in length and just about the width

of the bus. Instead of driving carefully and gingerly across, whenever we approached one of these, the driver took a delight in revving up the engine and taking a leaping jump to the other side. Each time I held breath wondering where the wheels were going to come down. But no one else seemed the least concerned.

We reached the Pura centre about 5 or 6 o'clock, and almost immediately started a two-and-half-mile walk to Chil-sanka village to enable us to see some of it during day-light hours. There was no marked country lane or even a path, but Brindaban, Rushi Behera and one or two workers from Pura knew exactly where they were going, where to cross rocks or fields, or at which particular point to enter the shallow mountain streams which obstructed our progress. Brindaban with his incredible energy was always yards ahead of me.

As we were nearing the village the older children were shepherding their flocks of goats back for the night. Suddenly as from nowhere some fifty or so small black kids came galloping and baaing towards us from among the houses, pushing, squeezing and bucking one another until they had found their mother goat, and even while the herd moved they were thrusting their heads under the goats' bellies nuzzling at the udders. It was an unforgettable spectacle. Clouds of dust rose around us as buffeted on all sides we stood still to let the animals pass and move on ahead of us.

The three hundred odd villagers declared Gramdan ten years ago. Rather than asking them 'what has Gramdan done for you', I changed my question to 'what have you done for Gramdan?' It was interesting to note that the reply was identical in substance to all others. I was told that their land had been taken from them by money-lenders. Now they had got it back. They no longer took credit from money-lenders, they were helping one another, their children were getting education, crime has stopped since they jointly guarded the village.

So far not one villager had told me anything about Gramdan as a movement. For him it represents economic help, as in this instance bullocks, some cows for cattle breeding and the establishment of an agricultural loan fund. A dried-up river-bed acts as an irrigation channel for the paddy fields during the monsoon. After the rains the men were hoping to construct a reservoir.

In 1957 a well was started by a government contractor. It was dug to a depth of fifteen feet. The contractor then produced a document stating that the well had been completed. He took the men's thumb-prints, making sure that the three literate people in the village were nowhere about, and departed. He collected his payment from the authorities and was not seen again. For ten years the villagers waited for him to come back or for someone else to complete the well. At last even the villagers got impatient. This year they have taken matters into their own hands. They got a letter written to the block office. When nothing happened they wrote to the district office, and they have now been promised completion of the well this month.

Would they have succeeded but for the pressure exercised by the village council representing them as a unified force? Would they but for Gramdan and the sense of power it gave them, have done anything against the authorities? I doubt it.

By the time we got back to the Pura centre I was sneezing my head off, and Rushi Behera went into action with hot saline foot baths and gargles which he brought to the neat little room which was mine for the night. We were a few thousand feet up, the night air was cool and fragrant with the scent of flowers. During every one of my journeys across the length and breadth of India I experienced spells of incredible happiness. Sometimes they were caused by people, at others by moments such as these. They never lasted. Something always happened to change a mood of peace to one of irritation. To night it was caused by mosquitoes which descended on me in swarms, and I had no net. I faced the next day unslept and with a streaming cold.

With his customary perseverance Brindaban had secured a truck as an alternative to non-existent jeeps. In this we proceeded from village to village or to within a few miles' reach, driving over ground that would have tested the toughest vehicles. We burst one of the double rear tyres and as there was no 'spare' I kept my fingers crossed that the other one would hold. It did.

At some distance from the village of Kainjhariguda we stopped to look at the tank. Nearby stood a memorial stone with an English inscription linking the sponsoring group in

England with the village. Villagers and workers showed it to me with pride. But I found the idea out of taste and reminiscent of the British Raj. Surely the money could have been put to better use, particularly when Brindaban off-handedly remarked: 'When so much money is spent what do a few hundred rupees matter?' I gathered from the correspondence file that these stone are going to pop up like mushrooms all over the area. Even if one or two have been erected at the request of the sponsoring group, I did not think that they represent the spirit in which War-on-Want money is raised.

But the people of Kainjhariguda were happy about the tank with its fish, and about the stone. They were a lively and go-ahead community anxious to talk, to show me their collective sugar-cane cultivation and invite me into their homes. Some of these tribal villages are charming. This one was 'no exception and I was thrilled when I discovered an old beautifully carved and metal-studded door inside one of the cottages. The women were particularly forthcoming. They told me that they felt the collective power of Gramdan; they had more grain, new cooking vessels of brass and another set of clothing to change into. This they had done in my honour and they looked neat and clean. They were healthier today, there was less illness among them, especially malaria. Even so, seven babies died of malaria last year and ten this year, and during the rainy season ten children between the ages of three to five, four fifteen-year-olds and one man of thirty died of dysentery—a high percentage among a population of two hundred and eighteen.

The men were in trouble with the police. An officer had come to the village and ordered a number of men to carry loads to his quarters without wages, as had been the custom, but was now a punishable offence. The men refused, whereupon one of them was beaten up by the police officer, and a quarrel followed. The officer took the men along to the police station and had them all beaten. Then he filed a case against them. The villagers in turn filed a case against the police officer for unlawful activities. At the time of my visit the case was up for trial. I am quite sure that but for the sense of power that Gramdan had instilled in them the men would never have

asserted their rights and gone to court against a police official.

Limka with its hundred families was the largest village I visited in the Koraput district. A small reception committee awaited us at the road-side and accompanied us for the one mile walk across fields to the newly constructed tank within a short distance from Limka. The village band met us half way, and the rest of the people were gathered by the tank in welcome. It was a moving and festive occasion. Men and women were dressed in clean clothes, always an indication that the economic level was at least slightly above subsistence. The women wore garments of brilliant colours and were adorned with bangles and nose-rings which sparkled in the sudden flashes of sunlight.

We had the usual kind of discussion. For the last two years intensive efforts have gone into development work. The well-built cement-walled tank, with steps leading down to the water level, was a credit to the people. Noticing the changes which had taken place at Limka, fifty surrounding villages declared Gramdan in consequence.

While we were talking I had ample time to study the features of the women. They were unmistakably tribal with their round plump faces and nose rings of a kind which would always mark them out. I asked the young girls if the rings didn't get in the way, and pointed to my own nose which I was constantly mopping in between sneezing. They reacted with shrieks of laughter. 'But', I continued, 'perhaps the ring was necessary to discipline them'. And I told them why farmers in the West put rings through the noses of bulls. This time it was the men who exploded into roars of laughter, and our meeting ended with a great deal of hilarity and banter.

Although the occasion was enjoyable I had the disconcerting impression that this was a 'show village!' The impression was reinforced when on saying good-bye the women asked for 'baksheesh' and spoiled an otherwise pleasant memory.

We proceeded to a small workers' centre at Koraput. I was by now convinced that Brindaban had planned to take me only to these 'show villages'. To reach the next one I would have to undertake a six mile cross-country walk there and back, and, as Brindaban pointed out, 'at the rate you walk

it'll take you at least an hour to get there and another one to get back if not more'. I am normally a good walker and a fast one, but I simply had not got the energy left to contemplate another 'route march' which would have amounted to an endurance test, and not added anything new to my experience.

'Is it another good village?' I asked him. 'Yes', he replied, 'very good work goes on there, that is why I want you to see it'. 'Look', I said, 'I have seen the excellent work you are doing. I would like to be taken to a village where Gramdan has failed or where no constructive work has begun. I need a variety of impressions'. He would not listen, and we had a real tussle of wills. Mine proved to be the stronger in the end. I did not relish my victory—far from it, for it left me wretchedly conscious of an unpleasant incident, and I felt upset. But had I not insisted I would never have seen Gechela, as yet untouched by any constructive work, and met its people.

Gechela is a double hamlet of two hundred people tucked away among the trees of the hill-side about three-quarters of a mile from the road-side. The villagers declared Gramdan in 1953 because 'other villagers in the area had done so'. For fourteen years they had, in their words, waited for better things to come, land distribution, abolition of forced labour, reclamation of unbroken land, irrigation—they knew all about it. In spite of the long delay it was astonishing that they still remembered their commitments to the Gramdan declaration.

There is no school in the village, and no one is literate. The villagers possess a few cows but do not know how to milk them. I had thought milking to be a natural accomplishment of country folk. Apparently the tribals consider the milking of cows sinful, a superstition based on the malpractice of milking the cow dry before the calf has been weaned and causing its death.

I don't know the reason for the delay in developing Gechela but I am full of admiration for a community which has retained its positive outlook for fourteen years.

When I said good-bye to Brindaban at Rayagada that evening and thanked him, he replied: 'It is my duty', a response I was to hear many times. It always made me feel that my visit must have been a nuisance. In fact, I think it was simply a



different usage of words by people whose mother tongue is not English. The warmth and dignity with which the sentence is uttered surely ought to mean: 'It has been a pleasure'. I know how often I myself affronted people unwittingly as on the occasion when I exclaimed, 'Oh, how stupid', meaning my own lack of understanding, and my companion thought for a moment that it was directed at him. Fortunately he had sufficient intelligence to tell me about it a little later, and we were able to get things sorted out.

In spite of the strains and stresses of the last few days I shall always hold Brindaban in high regard if for no other reason than that he was the only person during all my travels who presented me with a typed sheet giving precise details and all the necessary information for every village before we got there; an immense help.

We left Rayagada for Angul in the Dhenkanal district by the now familiar night train, a wait, another train, another wait and a five hour bumpy bus ride which left me sore and aching in every bone. Our train had stopped at Barpali where a ten-year Quaker project had been handed over to the local authorities in 1962. As we moved out of the station I noticed a busy Barpali-type latrine industry. In fact Barpali-type latrines are a by-word in Dhenkanal. I was therefore all the more surprised to find 'hole in the ground' latrines at the Utkal Navajeevan Mandal (Orissa New Life Society Ashram) at Angul. Yet the rattan enclosures hiding these deficiencies blended well with the garden-like setting of the compound. The ashram consisted of a basic school and a small hospital, apart from the charming little houses dotted among the greenery which housed members of the community.

It was quite late when we arrived, and I was taken for coffee and sandwiches to Pearl, a Peace Corps volunteer and a delightful grandmother of 72 years. During the following two days I had several talks with Pearl, and observed the other 22-year-old Peace Corps lad who was in the habit of dropping in. Seeing these two together brought out the whole problem of volunteer placements. I had now met a number of them either attached to institutions like the Abhoy Ashram or teaching in one or other school, all of them frustrated and disappointed

that they could not make a greater contribution, that they felt themselves isolated and unable to establish close relationships with their Indian counterparts, that they had no definite assignments, that they did not experience the real India by teaching in English-medium schools, that, as one girl put it, 'I am in a post which could be better filled by an Indian woman. I feel conscious of taking somebody's bread and butter.'

The young lad at Angul was chasing all over Orissa and into Calcutta, writing long letters back to the States to get a new-type small irrigation pump designed which he thought would be useful. 'He doesn't feel so badly about everything', Pearl explained, 'he is extroverted. But his pal is in Calcutta for treatment. Things eat into him and his tummy is constantly out of sorts'. Two thoughts struck me then. Firstly, how necessary a grandmother-like person is in this situation, where the youngsters can drop in and let off steam, dismiss her advice as 'Oh, she is old, how could she understand', while at the same time taking notice and feeling comforted. And I believe it is the very disparity in age which is helpful. Seniors nearer to the age of the volunteer will always represent the very generation against which youth will kick in the process of growing up. They may be necessary as directors but a grandmother's knee to lean against can be a tremendous asset in these often very difficult situations. And secondly, it occurred to me that volunteers with specific qualifications should be selected for definite assignments prior to their being sent overseas, so that both project directors and volunteers know exactly what is expected of them. I believe this would avoid many of the present pitfalls and frustrations. I discussed this with various people connected with the placement of volunteers and found them sufficiently in agreement to pursue these ideas.

I, too, although not being of the 'volunteer age', but having come through a pretty rough passage, felt Pearl's mothering soothing. 'Go to bed now', I was told, 'and have a long night's rest. Don't get up until you are ready'. With these words I was taken to the small one-roomed cottage of one of the senior workers who had vacated it for me. My bed was placed in the open and this kind woman, whose name escapes me, fluttered around me like a mother hen round her chick, anticipating my

every need and not leaving me until I was well and truly settled for the night. How I appreciated a woman's touch! It was past midnight. Sleep evaded me for a long time; far too many impressions and thoughts were chasing one another in my head. I lay under the dark blue canopy of a sky dotted with millions of stars. I listened to the gentle rustle of leaves in the nearby trees and shrubs, and gradually drifted into unconsciousness.

A long night's rest! At five o'clock in the morning I had my first visitors, members of the staff who came to greet me and enquire with solicitude after my well-being. I was holding court sitting on my bed dressed in my night attire. Nobody minded, so why should I? At six o'clock Malati Choudhury turned up, having just missed her bus for Cuttack where she was dashing off for a meeting. I was delighted to see her. 'I expect I was meant to miss the bus so that I could be with you', she croaked, for she too had caught a bad cold on our drive into the Ganjam hills, and had barely any voice left. But for Malati to rest her voice and not to talk was like stopping a bird from singing.

No special programme had been arranged for this day. It was a wonderful relief just to relax and not make any effort. I went to the office to find Rushi Behera who looked relieved at having been able to shift his responsibility for me. He was busy catching up with a back-log of work, but found time to give me details about the different agencies working in Orissa. So many different names had constantly cropped up in our discussions that I was puzzled as to how they all functioned.

There were eight altogether. The Utkal Navajeevan Mandal, the Orissa New Life Society, was mainly concerned with the uplift of backward classes and tribals through child and maternity welfare, adult education, improved agriculture and other social services, follow-up work in Gramdan villages, and workers' training.

The Utkal Khadi Mandal, Orissa Khadi Society, was as the name indicates promoting Khadi and village industries. The Utkal Sarvodaya Mandal, Orissa Sarvodaya Society, was primarily engaged in bringing about mass consciousness, collecting new Gramdan villages, arranging land distribution through

the Orissa Statutory Body sponsored by the Orissa Government. The Utkal Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Orissa Gandhi Memorial Institute, was promoting the Gandhian ideology and undertaking constructive programmes as outlined by Gandhi. The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust trained women workers in maternity and child welfare. The G.D. Narayan Seva Sangh, G.D. Narayan Service Society, was also concerned with developing the Khadi industry. The Narayan Patna Khetra Samiti's functions are limited to the Narayan Patna police district in Koraput, promoting Gramdan, Shanti Sena, agriculture and employment through Khadi and village industries; and lastly the Baipariguda Khetra Samiti, whose area of operation is limited to the Baipariguda police district of Koraput, is mainly concerned with the setting up of agricultural and forest co-operative societies and other allied social services.

All these societies are financed by grants and donations from the State Government, the Khadi Commission, the Sarva Seva Sangh and War-on-Want, except the Gandhi Memorial and Kasturba Trusts which have their own national funds. The largest financial contributions come from state and district government sources and the Khadi Commission.

On the following day I was asked to give a talk at the nearby Basic Teachers' Training College—basic in name only. Equipment for training in practical subjects was practically non-existent. The trainees were also not sufficiently interested. Government policy and funds do not support basic education except where it runs side by side with the prescribed educational syllabus. Basic education therefore demands extra resources in finance and personnel.

After briefly introducing me to the trainees, the principal asked me why I had come to India. In reply I explained how I had become involved with Sarva Seva Sangh and found myself embarking on a speech in support of the Gramdan movement. I can only hope one or two of the budding teachers who were present will have been stimulated to study the subject.

'I never talk to them about Gramdan', said Nabakrishna Choudhury, whom I had only met that morning. But there was no time to discuss this comment further for we moved on to Champati Munda, a Basic Higher Secondary School, some ten

or twelve miles away. The school was built on seventy-two acres of government-allocated land. Only nine acres have been re-claimed for cultivation which gives the eighty boys between the ages of fourteen and eighteen barely one hour a day in agricultural work. Lack of irrigation prevents further land reclamation and there are no funds to finance this. The agricultural instructor is self-taught! There is no work-shop, the only other practical subjects being spinning and weaving.

I talked to the boys and asked them what they were going to do after leaving school. Oh, what misguided ideas these poor kids were having about themselves and their future. They were going to college, they were going to study economics, philosophy, Sanskrit, physics, political science, they were going to be successful and get jobs. At last one boy stood up and exclaimed: 'I am not clever enough, I will go back to my village and work on the land'. I could have hugged him. He was so sincere and honest, facing his ability and future prospects squarely, and encouraged by him others came forward with less inflated ideas about themselves.

At Champati Munda I came right up against the futility of an educational system which takes village boys away from the land only to throw them eventually among the vast number of unemployed white collar workers. Given adequate funds this school could be developed into a two-stream institution whereby those boys who are not suitable for academic pursuits could be given a good grounding in general education combined with a fully planned training in agriculture, dairying, poultry farming, simple mechanics and maintenance of farm equipment. There is a crying need for this kind of development which could function side by side with the government-aided 'matric'-oriented educational syllabus. It would need financial support from some agency. At the same time the seventy-two acres of land should be fully developed as a base farm for demonstration and training purposes in modern agricultural methods. Within a few years the farm would be able to make a substantial contribution towards expenses. But most important for its success would be the selection of a well-qualified staff. It is in this sphere where pre-selected volunteers would be able to function well, both to their own satisfaction and the benefit

of the community which they would be serving.

At the time of my visit there was no prospect of ever achieving this. At least Nabakris na Choudhury gave me no hope for any such prospects. He was disillusioned in an optimistic sort of way. We had little opportunity to talk but I came to respect him as an extremely kind and knowledgeable person who in spite of disappointments and just criticisms gave all his support to the movement. Apart from his many local commitments in Orissa he is involved in a number of national committees, not the least among them the executive of the Sarva Seva Sangh and the Gandhian Institute of Studies at Benares.

I had given a talk to teacher trainees in the morning, I had talked to the older boys at Champati Munda and coming down the scale I was asked later to talk to the hostel children at Angul. The hostel was established in 1946 with eighteen students to give educational facilities to children from tribal and backward communities. Today there are one hundred and thirty boys and girls from nine districts at the institution, and of these eighty per cent are tribal children. With the increase in numbers the hostel had to extend and a reading room, dining-hall and kitchen were added to the original modest building. The children are active from dawn to dusk. They rise at four o'clock, take their bath, wash their clothes and then settle down to prayers, followed by cleaning of the hostel buildings and work in the various projects organised and supervised by the teaching staff. They have a good meal before leaving for school at ten o'clock, returning at four o'clock in the afternoon. From five until six there are games and sports activities again followed by a period of prayers. The evening meal begins at seven o'clock. Meals entail helping with the preparation, serving, clearing away, and washing up. When all is neat and tidy and ready for the next morning the children study until it is time for bed at half past nine. In spite of their many and varied activities the children do well in their examinations, and a number move on to the secondary school at Champati Munda. Some of the old pupils are already teachers or are undergoing teachers' training, others are studying in colleges or have become agricultural workers and stockmen, others again have found jobs in the various organisations mentioned earlier.

When I looked at the children who were assembled in the dining hall it was hard to believe that they were the brothers and sisters of the miserable wretches I had seen in the villages. The boys sat on one side, the girls on the other. They varied in age from eight to fourteen years. We discussed the merits of working with one's hands and the dignity of manual labour. One little boy stood up and asked: 'How are we to learn skills like the ones you mention? Workshops and tools cost money. Who is to give us these?' A teacher supported him by stating that he would like to see more emphasis on practical training for both children and workers, and asked if it would not be possible for some aid to be diverted from mere technical assistance to training programmes. 'We too need to be far better qualified in modern techniques and scientific methods if we are to help the children and bring about the necessary changes in the villages', he ended.

The girls were less serious-minded. They wanted to know about Christian weddings in England and other ceremonies and customs, particularly as they affected girls. Embarrassing questions drove me into tight corners from which I had to extricate myself.

The two days at Angul ended far too quickly, and the next morning saw us again on the road for Cuttack and the Orissa Sarvodaya head office. Rushi Behera and Malati Choudhury were coming with me. On the way we stopped at the Orissa State Palmgur Co-operative which owed much of its growth and success to Malati's energies.

Any manufacturing industry has its fascination, but when the process of converting natural resources into cash profits becomes a means of social reform by preventing continuous drunkenness among the impoverished backward classes one's interest quickens. The industry developed from small beginnings and by 1966, 1,606 tree owners were working as tappers, 235 persons were being trained in the various manufacturing processes and 47 sales centres had been opened in thirteen towns. Over a million rupees worth of unrefined sugar was being produced and sold; and a further Rs. 7,600 worth of other edibles such as sweets, and more than Rs. 10,000 worth of non-edible products, such as matting, brushes and baskets, were also sold. One has to trans-

late these figures into statistics representative of a tribal and non-tribal rehabilitation programme, to be able to assess their real value.

I was keenly interested in seeing every part of the industry as well as visiting the plantation of young trees. With true Indian hospitality we were served with refreshments. But our time was limited and we could barely do justice to them. We need not have hurried. True to the pattern of my Orissa tour, plans for my onward journey from Cuttack to Keonjher were again chaotic, and the usual discussion regarding arrangements took place. Eventually it was decided that we should not proceed until the next morning. Malati said good-bye and returned to Angul, and I was shown into one of the offices and told to rest. This then was my first acquaintance with a concrete floor. I had no bedding with me except a pillow and heavy dark cotton sheet, all that I had needed for overnight train journeys at that time of year. In future I never found myself quite so unprepared again.

Having a half day in hand I asked if I could possibly go to nearby Bhubaneswar to see the famous temples. Of course, this could be arranged. I would have liked to have gone immediately. 'You must rest first', I was told, because everybody else wanted to rest. As Indian people get up incredibly early their request was more than reasonable but when the hours slipped by and the unyielding concrete floor, combined with the intolerable stench from the monsoon drain outside my window, made rest impossible I had to fight hard to control my impatience. It was four o'clock when we left. A call on the Deputy Chief Minister and the Deputy Minister of Agriculture had been included as part of the outing. We sat in an imposing office in the equally imposing modern ministerial building. The short call stretched into a lengthy and interesting dissertation on the advantages of being poor in India as compared with Western countries, and the relative happiness of the masses. Out of the corner of my eye I watched the sun dipping behind buildings and the sky darken. And still they talked. 'Madam', the Minister challenged me, 'I want you to visit every village in the state. You as a foreigner can bring new incentives and inspiration to our people'. And with a majestic sweep of his arms he brought



his hands together and ended the meeting.

It was pitch dark outside and I realised that sight-seeing and grassroot studies just did not mix.

The 120 miles drive to Keonjher was well worth the hours on the road. While my eyes roam my mind begins to digest previous impressions so that in spite of the physical strain I get a certain amount of mental relaxation. Many times I had wondered why men carrying heavy loads run at a slow trot. How have they got the energy? On the way to Keonjher I found the answer by merely watching. The loads were carried suspended on either side of long poles across the men's shoulders. By trotting along the road the loads were swinging with their movements instead of dragging their weight.

We arrived at Keonjher. To my intense pleasure the Deputy Chief Minister had arranged for my accommodation at the Government Rest House, which, if simple, offered adequate and spacious facilities. I am going to enjoy tonight, I thought happily as we proceeded to the village of Kantiapura. Keonjher district is a mining area and generally the economic level is slightly higher than elsewhere in the villages which I had visited, for the unemployed and landless can earn a living in the mines. Kantiapura, a large village of 150 families, declared Gramdan in 1957 and became legalised in 1960. Land was distributed and each family cultivates roughly four acres. Without irrigation facilities this is not sufficient. Continued droughts have forced the villagers to switch from paddy to wheat, maize and ragi, a form of millet. Co-operative farming was tried unsuccessfully for three years when the villagers reverted to individual farming. The shortage of water is critical. War-on-Want funds helped to improve the existing tank for a small irrigation scheme, the only supply of water for all purposes other than drinking water, and quite inadequate. The existing wells dry up every summer but since a new well has been constructed with War-on-Want aid the villagers need no longer drink the polluted water from the tank during the dry period.

Two women village workers have been active among the people for ten years, and their influence was very apparent. Their activities conformed to the usual pattern of nursery classes, teaching the women stitching and generally improving the

appearance of the village. The Gramdan workers in the district too impressed me as doing a good job in interpreting Vinoba's message. " 'The collective force' is the meaning of Gramdan," said the women. "Let us have enough food and the means to improve our homes and do more for the village first, then we will go out and collect more Gramdan villages". The men, too, mentioned the new concept of 'sharing and caring'. They keep in touch with other Gramdan villages. It was gratifying to find this out-going spirit among the people of Kantiapura which is, no doubt due to the calibre of the workers. It clearly indicates how much depends on their perception and energy in involving the villagers in the movement.

The people of a neighbouring village where we called briefly had once been a tribal community. One or two generations ago they had left the tribe and integrated into the Hindu society alas at the lowest rung of the caste structure. The men could not tell me what they had hoped to gain from this step, but they could give the reason why they were unable to declare Gramdan. In days gone by all their land had been donated as temple land, and it was no longer theirs to 'gift' to the village community.

Rushi Behera's married daughter lived at Keonjher. We were invited to her home for our evening meal. Afterwards I was escorted back to the Government Rest House. Rushi Behera stayed behind. My escort had come with us from Cuttack. I wonder where he is going to sleep, I thought. I needn't have wondered at all. He entered my room with me. There were two beds next to one another. He took off his shirt and settled down on one. I hesitated for barely a moment, then fully dressed lay down on the other, thanking God for the provision of a mosquito net, a flimsy pretence at privacy, and felt mirth rising within me. I suddenly remembered a Danny Kaye film I had seen many years ago. Danny had kissed his girl friend goodnight. He was so overcome by the kiss that he not only walked blindly through a lily-pond, he didn't even notice it. My companion was just as blissfully unaware that there was anything unusual in the present situation. He never asked if I minded, which was perhaps just as well. What could I have said? He was the first of 'the men I slept with' during my travels!

On the journey back to Cuttack and to Calcutta I tried to

sort out the many impressions I had collected over the last month, and to assess how War-on-Want funds had helped in rural development. There can be no doubt about results in kind. Wells have been dug, tanks and dams have been built, grain stores erected, bullocks and fishing nets have been given, loan funds established. These are the facts which must be gratifying to the donors. The money which has been raised by groups in England has been used for the purpose for which it was intended. But for those involved in rural development the vital problem remains.

Aid superimposed on a backward community from outside remains a relief operation, as summed up in the villagers' cry: 'You must help us, what can we do, we are poor, we know nothing'. It has become the stumbling-block to progress. The emphasis will have to be shifted from projects to people if any kind of social change is to go hand in hand with material advance. Only if the people are given a sense of responsibility can this come about. They have been conditioned into accepting help and to looking for leadership from outside, whether through the block office or direct aid from foreign voluntary agencies. Any failure of progress is blamed on these outsiders whom they expect to tell them what to do and how to do it, and to give them the wherewithal with which to do it. It has created two groups of people, those who give and those who receive. The knowledge that there is an outside source from which they can expect help whether in kind or in the form of leadership, is hindering rather than furthering development by its psychological effect on the people, for it has instilled in the minds of the villagers the idea that if they wait long enough more money will come from abroad. They only need to keep on asking. •

I also questioned the emphasis on Gramdan villages in tribal areas until I began to understand its wider implications. In a state where a third of the population is tribal, members of the village council will or could develop into a pressure group which could effect a sweeping over-all change by strengthening non-violent political awareness.

I left Orissa with a painful consciousness of contrast. There was the loveliness of the progressive tribal villages, the dead and

apathetic atmosphere of those as yet untouched; the splendour of the new administrative city of Bhubaneshwar and its ancient temples, side by side with the squalor of the bazaars. It was this contrast that presented a continuous challenge.

On my return to Calcutta I met Kshitish Roy Choudhury. I told him of my talks with the businessmen, and he was going to follow up my introductions. Then he asked me how I had got on in Orissa, and all my pent-up feelings, my misery and frustration at the wretchedness of the masses outside any constructive programmes, that I had seen on my long drives through the countryside, poured out. Kshitish Roy listened attentively. 'You know', he said quietly after a while, 'there are some things we must leave to God. None of us can take upon ourselves the whole of the burden'.



THE FACE OF PUHAR (pg. 1)



WE HAVE LEARNED TO LOVE BEYOND THE FAMILY



WITHOUT COMBINED EFFORTS THERE CAN BE NO RESULTS



MAYBE IT WORKS, MAYBE IT DOESN'T. I AM GIVING IT A TRY



I broke my return journey to Benares at Gaya to be with John for a few days. His assignment in Bihar was drawing to a close. While I had been away new plans regarding his future activities had evolved and were just about to be finalised. He had received an invitation from the Gandhian Institute of Studies to undertake a research into certain aspects of Indo-Pakistan relations, possibly for a year, starting in November.

The Gandhian Institute of Studies was founded by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1960, and is a first attempt to 'link together the Gandhian Movement and Social and Political Sciences. It fulfils a special need as a research organisation, primarily focusing its programme on the emerging problems of growth and development. India has inherited a vast treasure of Gandhian ideas. The Institute aspires to analyse these, to find out their relevance to post-independence India and the world, and to apply its findings to current problems and events.

As the Institute buildings are in the same compound as those of the Sarva Seva Sangh we would both be based in Benares, although our jobs would be taking us in different directions. John would have to conduct his research in some of the large cities whereas I would have to continue travelling in rural areas. But at least there would be times when we could be together.

Before setting off on another tour I wrote my reports to War-on-Want and discussed my impressions with Radhakrishna. In doing so I realised how much more I had to learn about the movement and the type of workers who were carrying out the various programmes. I needed to know in depth what I could only guess at from my observations.

There are in India today two distinct types of social workers.

the professional ones, who have graduated from the various institutes of social work and are mainly engaged in different fields of social service run by government or private agencies; and the constructive workers who engage in community development as outlined by Gandhi and later by Vinoba.

The concept of constructive social work was developed by Gandhi during the struggle for Independence as part of a national revolutionary movement. Gandhi felt that only through constructive social work could the leaders establish contact with the Indian masses. It was due to the Gandhian constructive programme and its educational function that the masses were drawn into the national movement on such a large scale. Gandhi also realised that, without discipline and preparation through constructive work, non-violent civil disobedience (satyagraha) would be impossible.

After Gandhi's death, Pyare Lal, his secretary, published a document which he described as Gandhi's last Will and Testament. It contained a resolution for the All India Congress Committee, drafted by Gandhi, and, as Pyare Lal pointed out, had Gandhi lived it might have been improved further. It puts in the briefest terms the whole concept of post-Independence constructive social service. "Though split in two, India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, that is, as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its 700,000 villages as distinguished from its cities and towns. The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies. For these and other similar reasons the All India Congress Committee resolves to disband the existing Congress Organisation and flower into a Loka Sevak Sangh (People's Service Society) under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand."

Therefore Gandhi conceived his revolution not in terms of political action but of social action, in terms of revolution by constructive or social work.

Due to the hard struggle for survival in which individual families are involved in rural areas, one finds hardly any kind of collective and co-operative initiative. But without collective or co-operative endeavour development in rural areas is just not possible. Unless this capacity is developed to enable the people to come together and face their common problems, there will be very inadequate and unsatisfactory implementation of the policies and programmes evolved at the Planning Commission or Central Government level, or at the level of state governments, district or block levels. But this capacity cannot be created by merely spending money, giving technical advice and the setting up of an administrative machinery. Almost 85% of the people live in rural areas. Without utilizing their efforts, mobilising their resources and organising their energies, national development cannot go very far. Only by widespread and intense constructive work and social service can the capacity for thinking and acting together be created among the people. The development of the people's power (Loka Shakti) can only be brought about by making people do things for themselves, by making them understand that unless they join their heads and hearts and hands together the problems which face them will never be solved and the task accomplished.

Gandhi's revolutionary concept of social work was to bring about changes, as for instance in the system of land-holding or land-ownership. To prevent exploitation through ownership of land, existing relationships between different classes in rural India would have to be reorganised. This process is the essence of Vinoba's Gramdan movement whereby individual land ownership is being voluntarily changed into community ownership. The Gramdan movement is not primarily a political but a social and educational movement. The change from individual to community ownership of land is not effected by organising the landless people, or small land-owning classes, against the bigger land owners or by any political activity, socialist or communist, but by a non-political psychological and ethical approach to social problems. Merely going round the villages and preaching how the job should be done achieves nothing. The right way is to show the villagers, by means of

social service, that if the land of the village becomes the property of the community, life in the village can be better organised, internal conflicts can be ended or eased, and co-operative efforts can be made, leading to economic development.

Most of the Sarvodaya or Gandhian constructive workers lack the scientific training that professional social workers consider essential, although Gandhi himself stated that the constructive workers should receive scientific training. At the same time the Gandhian concept of social revolution through constructive work is based on the theory of investment in man and the development of human values. If social change has to be brought about, such as a change in the land system, the tenancy laws, etc., it will have to be preceded by a change in the human beings concerned, by a change of heart and mind, of attitudes towards one another and towards their environment, including the land. The Gandhian process of social work aims at internal and external results, at changing both man and society.

The concept of Loka Shakti (people's power) incorporates certain goals and strives to build a new society. Although it lays greater stress on people's power than on state power it realises that state power has to play its role in the creation of this new kind of society.

The Sarva Seva Sangh has been criticised for not paying more attention to Parliament or other legislative bodies, but the Sarvodaya movement believes that if a sufficiently powerful movement can be created it will be reflected in the legislatures.

There are four different ways in which the words Loka Shakti (people's power) are interpreted by the Sarvodaya movement.

There is firstly the need for the reconstruction of small neighbourhoods and communities, people's power meaning the voluntary and collective endeavour of groups and masses. If people can identify and solve their problems or compel the community development organisations to give them the help which they require, it will create that kind of people's power. Records referring to medieval and ancient history point out that there were voluntary activities in the villages. Kingdoms

and dynasties came and went but village self-government in one way or other continued. This changed during British rule. Any kind of dynamism in the villages was lost. The Sarvodaya movement, community development, Panchayati Raj and other constructive work agencies like the Gandhi Memorial Trust are endeavouring to recreate this dynamism, this people's power. Some villages because of the right kind of internal leadership have been able to move towards this goal, but generally the people in the villages are not yet on the move.

•Secondly, there is the concept of people's power used as a means of resistance. According to Gandhi the people had to develop the capacity to resist any wrong, or to resist authority when it abused its power. People's power can only succeed if people are able to solve their own problems, work out their own development, and demonstrate that they can regulate and control their own affairs.

Thirdly, people's power is a force which can bring changes in existing institutions. This too implies non-violent resistance, non-cooperation, any non-violent means by which a wrong can be righted.

The fourth and last concept of people's power is a combination of all three. It is not enough that people should do something for themselves, resist wrongs and effect changes in existing institutions. Unless they also become strong enough to be self-governing and are capable of managing their own affairs, the real people's power will not be achieved. A great deal of Vinoba's writings dwells on this concept.

But people's power will have to be harnessed within a political and economic system. According to Jaya Prakash Narayan the present political system based on parliamentary democracy is like an inverted pyramid that stands on its head. The fact that every Indian has the right to vote does not make the pyramid broad based. The millions of individual voters are like a heap of particles of sand that can never be a foundation for any structure. For the durability of a structure—no matter how ambitious—depends on the strength of its foundation and the lower supporting levels. People remark, even in the villages, that although freedom came, it has not come to them. They complain that they are ruled in the same manner and by the same kind of

people as during the British Raj.

‘The broad upper levels of present-day democracy must be brought down to earth, so that the pyramid of democracy can become a real pyramid—narrow at the top and broad at the bottom. In such a system people at each level would have the fullest opportunity to manage all those affairs which are within their competence, pertaining to that level. Such a system of democracy would give the people a stake in democracy as well as the sense of ‘swaraj’ or self-rule.

Political and economic decentralisation and strengthening of the lower organs of government might make it appear as if that process would weaken the fabric of the nation and impair the strength and unity of the centre. The fact that fissiparous tendencies do exist in India and that there are local and linguistic loyalties and tensions, lends force to this view. But a closer examination of the matter would show that the country would be far more cohesive and strong as a nation, and the diverse groups making up India would live together far more happily, if they had as much freedom and opportunity as possible to manage their affairs and preserve and develop their uniqueness. An all-powerful centre concentrating on too many functions would only be outwardly strong. Inwardly, it would be under severe stresses and strains, and the danger of its falling apart would be ever-present.

Devolution of power would not necessarily imply a weak centre. It would be a matter of competence: that is at each level the elected authority would do all that it is competent to do.

The Government has already laid the foundations of participating democracy in the shape of Panchayati Raj, or what was called at first ‘democratic decentralisation’. The initiative for Panchayati Raj came originally not from political motives for broadening the base of Indian democracy or to lay the foundations for a ‘participating democracy’ but for obtaining full public cooperation in the execution of the development programmes. Because of its initial restricted aims its full significance has not been sufficiently widely grasped. In order that Panchayati Raj may become the base of a true participating democracy, certain conditions must be fulfilled.

First, an essential condition would be educating the people

in the widest sense of the term. This education should be imparted by disinterested, non-partisan agencies, engaged in social service or tasks of rural development. Political parties could make a great contribution provided they addressed themselves to the task in a non-partisan spirit.

Second, the success of Panchayati Raj would depend upon the extent to which organised political parties refrained from interfering with its functioning by using it as a means to climb to power.

• Third, there should be a real devolution of power and not a make-believe. For if democracy is to succeed it will be necessary that the people should be prepared and given full opportunity to shoulder responsibility. There are in Panchayati Raj three tiers of authority and administration: the village Panchayat, the block Panchayat and the district Panchayat. At each of these tiers the people should be given the opportunity to do for themselves all that would be within their competence.

Fourth, it would be imperative that at each level the local authority should be given its own minimum resources. For 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. Land revenue, even though it does not amount to very much, should be the first resource to be placed totally at the disposal of the village Panchayat.

Fifth, Panchayati Raj should exercise real authority over the civil servants under its charge who would be held fully accountable.

Sixth, of the three tiers the village Panchayat is obviously the foundation. The strength and vitality of the whole structure—and its democratic nature—would depend upon the strength and vitality and democratic nature of the village Panchayat. People's participation is the true measure of democracy. If there is any level of self-government at which the fullest participation is practicable, it is at the village level. The effectiveness of the village Panchayat, its strength and vitality, should depend upon the sustained, intelligent and enthusiastic interest and cooperation of the village community in its affairs and activities. If under Panchayati Raj the village Panchayat were not to draw their strength, authority and sustenance consistently from the village community, they would remain, as before, instruments through which the state government and its officers would con-

trol and manipulate the village population. Panchayati Raj reared on such a foundation would not be a structure of democracy rising from below but an extension of bureaucratic rule from above. The village Panchayat should therefore function as an executive of the village community. Only with full participation would the people awaken to their responsibilities and opportunities, and the village Panchayats cease to be convenient tools in the hands of the state or the vested and selfish interests in the village community, and become fit instruments for the execution of the people's will. When this happens the village community and not the village Panchayat will become the bottom tier, the ground floor of the edifice of democracy, providing it with the broadest and most stable and solid foundation.

If Panchayati Raj were to be made an instrument of further disruption in the villages, it would be a mockery of democracy and a tragedy. Electoral contests have already produced such tensions as to create a virtual stalemate in the affairs of the Panchayats. If this state of affairs were to continue, in a few years, everybody would become allergic to the ideas of Panchayat and Panchayati Raj, government from above through bureaucratic civil servants would be welcomed back, and people's democracy would be a total failure and a chimera.

There are different, even conflicting interests, in the villages. But the Panchayat cannot bring about any radical socio-economic change in village communities; it cannot abolish land-ownership, alter tenancy laws, re-distribute land, legislate on interest rates and money-lending. The real remedy for the economic and social divisions in the villages is to hurry up with the needed economic and social legislation, to enforce strictly the existing laws in these regards, and to intensify the vital but neglected work of adult mass education, rather than to encourage the existing divisions to accentuate conflicts and disharmony. The one single economic reform needed to make the village as well as its political and economic institutions effective and harmonious is to vest ownership and management of all village lands in the village community, so that each person in the village becomes an equal shareholder in the landed wealth of the village, and that wealth is utilised equitably for the benefit of every member of the community and the community as



a whole.

In India, where the ratio of manpower to land is so high, the proportion of the population dependent upon land is overwhelmingly large. Where the rural population is likely, in spite of the growing rate of urbanisation, to continue to rise; where the evil of fragmentation has become chronic and land legislation and administration are so complicated, encouraging litigation, perjury and other abuses, no lesser measures of land reform are going to make much difference. Vinoba's Bhoodan-Gramdan movement has gone a long way to prepare the ground for such a radical agrarian legislation.

The most important function of the village Panchayat is to initiate and execute plans and programmes of development after approval of the village community through the Gram Sabha. Experience shows that the villagers are being asked to make a common endeavour to better their lives, and at the same time they are fighting among themselves for the power to achieve that very end. Experience has also shown that, even when backward sections of the village have captured a Panchayat, defeating the traditionally dominant section by the electoral procedure, they have failed to achieve anything because of the non-cooperation and opposition of the defeated interests. The class conflict at village level is likely to help least those sections of the community which are most in need of it.

It is said that the village people are too backward, ignorant and ill-informed to be able to govern themselves. For centuries the rural masses have perforce had to suffer from extreme backwardness in some matters. They are, however, no more backward morally, or deficient mentally, than the urban elite. It would be wrong, undemocratic, even presumptuous, on that ground to deny them the right to self-government. The same kind of argument was put forward during the independence struggle, but was answered long ago when it was said that good government can never be a substitute for self-government. The remedy for backwardness is not to deny the people their sovereign rights but to enlighten, educate and train them as quickly as possible. 'Competence and ability for self-government can only thus be achieved.

The idea of Panchayati Raj arose out of the need to induce

public co-operation in the execution of development programmes. While in the political field devolution and decentralisation came to receive fair attention, the economic aspect of the matter was neglected. Political decentralisation is bound to remain nominal unless there is alongside it economic decentralisation. The Sarvodaya movement is emphasising this point.

There has been the belief that if the 'means of production, distribution and exchange' were to be nationalised, economic democracy would automatically follow. The experience of totalitarian communism has proved that even the complete nationalisation of all these means does not necessarily result in economic democracy; on the contrary, it ends up in the most rigorous economic dictatorship, giving rise to new forms of exploitation and inequality. A new way of democratic decentralisation must therefore be found.

It is clear that such a decentralised economy must be a small-machine and labour-intensive economy. There must be constant and planned efforts to improve small machinery so that their efficiency and productivity keep on rising. Research must be planned and encouraged. Wherever necessary and available, power should be utilised, keeping in mind the overall and integrated picture of the economy, so that imbalances between cost, production, consumption and employment are avoided. Furthermore a decentralised economy must aim at relating full utilisation of local and regional needs. For production and consumption of different commodities, different areas would serve as economic units, so that there might be some industries that are village industries, some that are block area industries, others that are district, state or union industries. Some of the latter will of course be large-scale. It is obvious that suitable economic measures will have to be devised to facilitate smallscale industrialisation of this type, and, what is more important, to protect this sector of the economy from the large-scale, centralised sector, so that it develops healthily and becomes viable.

In view of the man-land ratio and rate of population growth in the country, the rural population, despite agricultural development, must face progressive impoverishment if it has to remain dependent solely upon the land. Small-scale industri-

alisation must therefore be intimately integrated with agriculture, so that every village or a group of villages is developed as an agro-industrial community; combining agriculture, processing of agricultural products and small-scale industries. An agro-industrial community would not only process wheat and paddy, fruit and vegetables, sugarcane and cotton, but also manufacture radios, cycle-parts, small machines, electrical goods, and all those commodities that might be needed in the region. This kind of development would narrow the gap that is widening between city and village and mitigate the evils of urbanisation. The decentralised pattern of industry and trade would be of the owner-worker or co-operative type and not be bureaucratic or exploitative.

A decentralised economy is desirable because it is not only democratic but because it would yield immediate benefits to the masses. It would do so because it would offer employment on a large scale and produce wealth in a manner that would ensure its wide distribution and make 'wage-goods' immediately available to ordinary consumers.

In order to create such a decentralised economy it would be necessary to reform rural education. This should be non-bookish, practical and technical with special emphasis on training in agricultural techniques, and should include large-scale practical adult education.

So the philosophy of constructive work is visualized as part of the total philosophy of socio-economic reconstruction. It is a revolutionary approach which aims to secure a total change of the circumstances responsible for the existing social problems.

There are two schools of thought in the post-Gandhian field of constructive work. Firstly there are those who feel that constructive work should identify itself with political action in every sense of the term, going even as far as exploring the possibility of organising a party of Gandhian workers. Others, represented by Vinoba, feel that constructive work should steer clear of party politics and devote itself exclusively to welfare work. But even they must have a broad political perspective. They need to comprehend social action more realistically by actively and consciously realising the role of the overall social

and political philosophy of which any particular welfare activity forms only a part. Vinoba is deeply suspicious of the kind of activities which would detract the attention of the constructive workers from the main issue to the side ones. He therefore stresses the need for laying greater emphasis on spreading the movement, maintaining that it is for the village, the government and other workers to do the follow-up work.

On my next tour I was to become very conscious of the tension these two approaches create for the workers.

In the above chapter I have drawn widely on Jaya Prakash Narayan's writings, and I am indebted to him for allowing me to do so.

November is one of the most pleasant months in North India when the days are warm and sunny and the nights refreshingly cool. But my reports had been written up and posted and I had kept my nose buried in books long enough, so that I had no excuse but to get ready for another tour. In any case I was anxious to find out how much of what I had just learned in theory had been translated into action, and Radhakrishna arranged for me to visit the Konkan, that strip of Maharashtra which stretches between the Indian ocean and the Western Ghats from south of Bombay to Goa.

Up to now I had been concerned with the fact that the emphasis on social change in Gramdan villages outweighed economic development. In two of the three districts which I now visited the reverse seemed to be the case, and the story which unfolded itself as I travelled from village to village was confused, and answers to my questions often contradicted themselves, so that I was left with the sense of an unfulfilled mission. This was of course partly my own fault, for I was expecting results to justify the hopes and aspirations contained in the philosophy behind Gramdan which I had studied, without sufficiently taking into account the prevailing conditions and human limitations.

Almost as soon as I reached Bombay and from then onwards I was struck by the marked difference between my previous travels in the U.P., Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, and my present journey. I found a greater sense of discipline among the people, and I was conscious of being in a less over-populated area. I found greater cleanliness. The women were not in the habit of covering their heads and therefore kept

their hair tidy even while working. On many occasions I travelled at daybreak. But I did not notice squatting figures near railway embankments or within sight of the roads. May be the extensive forests with their natural cover allowed for greater privacy.

I first visited Gagoda in the Kolaba district, Vinoba's birthplace. I had come expecting great things, a kind of model village where the principles of Gramdan were being translated into actions which spoke louder than words. I was sadly disappointed. None of the villagers mentioned Vinoba or his teachings but only referred to the Bhāve family who had at one time owned all the land. The members of the Bhāve family had left the village, and in 1959 their one-time home had become the Sarvodaya Ashram.

The village declared Gramdan only as recently as 1963, and constructive work began after the formation of the village council in 1964.

Shri J.G. Dhavan, the head of the ashram, was unfortunately away sick and the man who took his place was unable to answer many questions relating to the village, its activities and problems. He had joined the ashram in 1962, and his main concern was the integration of Harijans into the caste Hindu community, and the promotion of the latrine programme. Even so, after five years, his lack of information regarding village affairs could only have been due to two causes. He was either not sufficiently interested in anything that was not directly connected with his own programme, or it was due to his own limitation. Whatever the reason, his shortcomings underlined the fact that while Gramdan remains a workers' movement the calibre of its workers is of paramount importance.

After the ashram started its work, drunkenness and fighting amongst the villagers gradually ceased. Gross exploitation by the land revenue department had been crippling the village economy. The ashram negotiated on their behalf, and the tax demand was consequently reduced. Over-payment was taken into account, and no land revenue has been paid for a number of years. Strangely enough, the non-payment of revenue was causing uneasiness among the villagers since they no longer

held receipts to assure them of their rights of ownership. Even before the advent of Gramdan six Harijan families had been integrated into the community. In the early days of the ashram's existence a number of spinning wheels had been plying but when they broke down they were never repaired and spinning stopped. Today the people are no longer interested in spinning. They earn an additional income through the brick-and-tile industry and the making of latrine pots.

There have been nursery teachers on and off over the years. The present girl takes literacy classes attended by sixteen men but none of the women. As the women have been given winnowing machines and improved 'chakkis' for rice pounding the hours saved in labour could well have been utilized by attending the literacy classes or in some other form of constructive programme. The women gift the husk to the brick-making industry, but they will not pay a token fee for the use of the machines.

The land owned by the Bhawe family has been distributed and the villagers now own up to ten acres each. They grow mainly paddy and millet. Without double cropping the yield is not sufficient to feed the village. But during last year ten wells have been dug under a government-aided scheme so that next season 90 acres out of the 280 available ones will be irrigated by electrically driven pumps. The three open domestic wells could easily be converted to provide safe drinking water if only the villagers and the workers could see the need for this. There are 21 latrines in the village, and the acceptance of the latrine programme should after all go hand in hand with other sanitary improvements. I asked to see one of these latrines. It was hidden among shrubs some twenty or more yards away from the four homes it was meant to serve. It was clean and looked as if it had not been used for a long time although one of the owners assured me that he had used it at seven o'clock that morning. I thought that in its inconvenient position and without water near at hand the walk to the fields past the well must make for an easier alternative!

A co-operative society was set up with aid from War-on-Want as share capital. Most of this plus 25% interest has been repaid to the Nirman Samiti, the constructive work commi-

tee, which allocates funds from its head-office at Poona. I was surprised that repayments had not gone to the village fund. But there is no village fund or village grain store, and I soon realised that there is also no proper understanding of the real purpose of either. Over the last few years social and economic changes have been achieved, but at Gagoda I had expected something more, something that was regrettably lacking in the atmosphere, and in the attitude of the villagers.

Perhaps the attitude of the ashram was indicative; electricity had come to the village, yet the ashram continued to function by the dim half-light of oil lamps as a symbol of simplicity. How can there be sustained progress and uplift in living standards when the workers deny themselves the efficiency of up-to-date facilities which are there on their doorstep; when Vinoba himself advocates a scientific approach to all development work.

But whatever my criticisms I was happy to be here. Villagers and workers were friendly and eager to show me every part of the village, and to let me admire the new wells and standing crops.

Later in the evening I stood by an open window in the Bhavé family house, and glanced across roof tops and gently undulating fields to the distant hills. Had Vinoba stood here as a little boy, I wondered? Had he felt the same peace steal over him which now enveloped me? Even if the villagers were not consciously aware that from among them had sprung a 'saint', I was stirred by the thought that I was sleeping under the same roof which had sheltered his childhood.

Next morning we walked for about a mile and a half across the fields to Gagoda Katkarwadi, one of the four other villages under the ashram's care. We left behind us the well-set-up main village, and entered the small hamlet of 35 tribal families. The contrast which met my eyes was striking, and the poverty and backwardness of the people were vividly apparent in the state of the dilapidated straw huts, and in the appearance of the men, women and children who looked unkempt and were covered in rags. Any efforts which had gone into developing this small community at one time have come to nothing. The villagers are today no better off than when they cultivated their



few acres as tenant farmers of the Bhave family, for even then they had been able to keep all produce for themselves instead of only a small fraction. So the distribution of the same acres as Bhoddan land had not changed their economic situation, and to supplement their livelihood 25 families go away for seasonal work, leaving ten families to look after the village. At the time of the land distribution in 1958 the villagers were given seven pairs of bullocks. All but one bullock died because of the villagers' lack of training in husbandry. There is no well for either irrigation or domestic purposes—a nearby spring providing drinking water. Less than two miles away at Gagoda ten new wells have been dug. Yet we were told by both villagers and workers that the land here was not suitable for well-digging.

Both men and women talked freely, and I felt that, given another chance, renewed efforts might yield better results. The men wanted fifteen pairs of bullocks, two or three cows, and to use the manure on their fields. The women complained that the school-master did not come regularly. They admitted that attendance of the children was poor. The teacher was paid according to the attendance register, and consequently had no interest. A one-time women's society was no longer functioning for lack of leadership, so one of the women said, who herself had all the makings of a good leader. She showed more strength of character than any of the women I had talked to at Gagoda, but this might have been due to the difference in the traditional behaviour pattern of caste Hindu and tribal women.

Who was to blame for this sad state of affairs? The people of Katkarwadi felt themselves to be the poor relations of those at Gagoda. So much was happening there, nothing here. Would they do better another time, given a second chance?

We continued our walk across the same kind of country. After less than a mile we reached Khadkichiwadi, another small hamlet of twenty tribal families. Just before we came to the village we stopped at a well: 'Whose is it', I asked. 'It belongs to Khadkichiwadi, I was told, having been built in 1960 for domestic purposes! It was situated at the very spot where the land of Katkarwadi joins that of Khadkichiwadi.

Yet only half an hour before I had been informed that the soil at Katkarwadi was not suitable for well-digging!

Here too, much needed to be done to harness the people's energy and ambitions in a constructive programme. As at Katkarwadi we had a lively discussion. What is the good, I thought, of talking about decentralised village industries and village self-sufficiency if nothing is done about it. At Gagoda there was a brick-and-tile industry, and latrine pots were being made. Here twenty-five women were engaged in box spinning and got their cloth in exchange for their spun yarn. Why was it not possible to develop these and other industries? We discussed how to promote such a programme but I doubt if anything will happen, for it would need a leader with the knowledge and the determination to make a success of such a project, and so far I had not met anybody who would fit that role.

Hemdi, another small tribal village lying on the main road which connects the small town of Pen with the main Poona-Mahableshwar road was another disappointment. This had been a malaria-infested area. The villagers had deserted their lands and only returned a number of years ago when they received 34 acres of Bhoodan land. Gramdan was declared in 1964 and a village council formed. The Dairy Development Society provided seven water buffaloes which gave 18 litres of milk a day at the beginning. But there was no training or oversight by the Dairy Development Society, and consequently all the animals died. After the delivery of the cattle not one member of the society had called again at the village for follow-up work. The available land produces only enough food for about four months in the year, and most of the people work as agricultural labourers. There had been an attempt at digging a well three years ago, but when stone was struck work was abandoned.

In fairness to workers and villagers certain facts regarding the particular village psychology in the district ought to be explained. Vinoba came to the area in 1956 at the time of the language dispute in the then Bombay State. Politicians and the public tried to persuade him to commit himself in favour of one or other faction. Vinoba refused to be drawn into the controversy. Immediately Marathi newspapers started to

prejudice people's minds, declaring Vinoba to be an agent of the Congress Party. When Vinoba reached the border area, the Belgaum press incited people, and he was not even allowed to speak. During the 1957 elections those villagers who had gone to Bombay for work returned to their homes and made anti-Congress propaganda. They further prejudiced the villagers' minds, and where Gramdan had already been declared office-holders and helpers were thrown out. A spirit of unrest and insecurity remained until the partition of Bombay State into Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1961. Only then did the Sarvodaya workers renew their contact with the villages.

We were meant to catch a bus at Hemdi but, as no one had any idea at what time it should get there, rather than wait we started to walk along the road, only to be overtaken by the bus after about two miles. We mounted with considerable relief and drove the remaining four miles to Savarsai, arriving about noon. We were greeted by Shri Kolhatkar and taken to his house. His family had lived in the village until 1950, and had looked after the village affairs in the traditional manner of wealthy landowners. When the family departed moneylenders had a free hand in exploiting the villagers. Lack of money forced the people into mortgaging their harvest in advance against an interest rate of 400% to 800% plus enforced labour. Conditions deteriorated. The villagers became bankrupt and lost all hope.

When the village declared Gramdan in 1964, the Kolhatkar family, now absentee landlords did not sign the declaration. Some 300 acres of their total acreage of 1,100 are arable and cultivated by 90 tenant farmers. These families have the right of continued cultivation of about two acres each, the rest of the land changes hands from season to season to prevent squatters' rights taking effect. Kolhatkar himself returned to the village in 1959. As a small boy he had decided that this was where he wanted to make his living. He gave up his job and home in Poona and came back to the old family house. He has now taken charge of the development work on behalf of the 'Nirman Samiti'. At the same time he has identified himself with the villagers and their problems—he owns four acres of land, no more than they do—and is creating a new leadership

from within.

Almost immediately on arrival an elderly man called at the house to meet me. He wore good clothes and sunglasses—no true villager ever wears these—so quite obviously he was not one of them. We had a lengthy talk about Gramdan. This gentleman, who owns a house and some acres of land in the village, does not hold with Gramdan development. 'What do we need Gramdan for?' he asked. 'Over the years I have helped the villagers whenever they came to me. Why change the existing pattern?' He gave the appearance of a benevolent father figure, always ready to respond to any request. After half an hour or so he walked off jauntily, cane in hand, in spite of his age. 'Who is he?' I asked Kolhatkar as soon as he had gone, and was told that he was one of the money lenders responsible for the exploitation of the villagers. Since the declaration of Gramdan his business must have had a considerable set-back, but by-gones had become by-gones and although he was averse to Gramdan he lived amicably enough amongst the villagers today.

The village is composed of five small hamlets of 100 families in all of which 90 are tribals, belonging to the Thakurs, Katkars and Kolis, the latter meaning fishermen. Only seven or eight adults are literate, but fifteen girls and twenty-five boys go to the two primary schools in the village which teach children up to the age of eight years. Five children go to a school two miles distant where they are taught up to the age of ten. After the declaration of Gramdan and the setting up of the village council a co-operative society was formed and registered. The two primary schools were started by the society.

A loan of Rs. 1,500 from the Co-operative Union Bank was used for land development. With free labour from 225 people six and a half miles of canals have been dug to utilize the river, a brook and small streams in and around the village to irrigate paddy land. Sixty acres of land have been reclaimed and 100 acres of old terraces repaired. A further loan and a subsidy have been used for the purchase of seven bullocks and one buffalo. A small poultry unit was set up, a fishery started in the reservoir, and manures and seeds were purchased. One new well has been constructed to irrigate three acres of paddy

land and fifteen acres of vegetables. Four acres of land are farmed collectively, and its produce stored in the village grain store and distributed by the village council. Mrs. Kolhatkar is its secretary. I asked her how she liked it here. She admitted that her husband's decision to leave the amenities of Poona and settle in the village had not been easy for her. But her involvement in the affairs of the village council has drawn her into the village community, and she seemed to be giving her husband full support.

- I was shown the village, the fields, the wells and last not least the deep-litter poultry unit with its 40 Leghorns giving 30 to 32 eggs a day at their best laying time. But, as Shri Kolhatkar pointed out, to make the unit profitable 100 birds were needed at an investment of Rs. 6000, and from where to get the necessary funds he did not know. I saw a newly arrived winnowing machine, rather bashed about by the Indian Railways, and watched the men set up the de-husking machine. The hand-operated winnowing machine will be used by the women for a token fee; the de-husking machine will give work and wages to five people for three months in the year.

Our meeting with members of village council was brief, as much work had to be done during daylight hours. Sarvani Elmkoli, the president, had donned a brilliant green shirt for the occasion. It was obvious that the men were led by Kolhatkar, but led willingly, ready to learn, share, and co-operate in what he wanted to achieve in the village. In spite of much progress the men are still hesitant to use new types of seed and fertilisers. When I asked them why, Sarvani Elmkoli said that it did no good. If he put fertiliser on his fields this year he would obtain a higher yield, but next year, unless he repeated the procedure, the yield would be reduced again. So what was the good? I asked him 'You took food this morning?' 'Yes', he replied. 'Because you have eaten you can work well today?' 'Yes', he said again. 'You will take food again tomorrow morning so that you can work well tomorrow also?' 'Yes', he replied. 'If you took no food tomorrow you would not feel strong, and not feel like doing good work?' I continued. He agreed. 'So it is with your fields but you would deny them their need of food in the form of fertiliser and yet expect them to

give you good yields'. The president's jaw dropped in amazed understanding, and a mumble of voices all round showed that the parable had made its impact.

Before we left Savarsai Kolhatkar handed me a *páper* in which he had set out the progress made over the past few years, and future plans. For instance, they had produced 1000 quintals of paddy on 140 acres in 1964. Two years later they had reclaimed another 60 acres and harvested an extra 400 quintals. But most significant were the figures relating to the eradication of exploitation by moneylenders. In 1964 the village was indebted to the amount of 600 quintals of grain. The following year this had been reduced by 50% to 300 quintals and one year later by 75% to 150 quintals. The annual shortage of food grains was postponed from April to June in the first year, to August in the second and to September in the third, and the share capital of the co-operative society rose from Rs. 300 in 1964 to Rs. 2,500 in 1967.

Our tour of the village and surroundings had taken us to the reservoir, a natural tank in a beautiful setting against a back-cloth of low hills. On its water danced lotus flowers and lilies, and in the distance stood long-legged cranes silhouetted against the horizon. Later we waited not far away for the bus which was to take us to Poona. Some tribal women from a nearby village passed us on the road. In the morning they had taken fire-wood to Pen. Now they were returning with purchases from the bazaar in baskets perched precariously on their heads. A daily six mile walk, a waste of energy, time and money. Would a shop in their village change this habit if there was no provision for some form of entertainment to take the place of the bazaar attractions?

My visit to Savarsai left me with much to think about. Were the people there any different from those at Gagoda, Katkarwadi, Khadkichiwadi and Hemdi? I doubt it! Surely the difference lay in the approach of the workers. Kolhatkar, although he is in charge of the development work on behalf of the 'Nirman Samiti', was one of the villagers, he belonged, whereas in the other villages the workers had remained outsiders, living in a community as in Gagoda, or visiting occasionally as in the case of the other villages. They had remained

separate, even reactionary, over-seeing, but not integrating.

It was dusk when we boarded the bus, and it was dark for most of the drive along the twisting, winding road to Poona, so that I was left with only an inkling of its hidden beauty. The Poona office in its humble setting contrasted oddly with the grandeur of the Western Ghats. We arrived late and too tired for any kind of useful talk with Shri Govind Shinde who is in charge of the office and the Gramdan work in the Konkan. At the time of my visit he was deeply involved in a campaign for obtaining more Gramdan villages, and was too busy to accompany me during part of my tour. This was regrettable for he would have been able to enlighten me on many questions. Jayawant Matkar who had been seconded to come with me and who had met me in Bombay was, at the age of 23, too immature and inexperienced to give me the wider orientation that I needed. He too had been withdrawn from the Gramdan campaign to be with me.

Our visit to the Satara district was sheer pleasure. From Poona to Mahabaleshwar the road wound upwards through mountains and valleys of breathtaking beauty. From the bus I observed the results of an extensive agricultural programme. There were wells in abundance irrigating thick standing crops with electrically driven pumps. The red soil and the lush green of the trees under a brilliantly blue sky kept company with me from now on wherever I went.

During the time of the British Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani had been developed as hill stations offering many delightful walks to innumerable beauty spots! The proprietors of one of the many Indian style hotels were friends of Jayawant Matkar and Shri Dhube, the local worker, and offered us hospitality. We had no sooner arrived at the hotel when I had a brief visit from the Block Development Officer. He turned out to be an energetic young man, obviously capable and very much aware of the fact. He emphasized his sympathy with Gramdan and admitted that it helped his own programme. He had only been there for three months and was unlikely to stay for any length of time as there seemed to be a policy of frequent postings between blocks and administrative jobs for government servants with different background training. The

present Block Development Officer had been a magistrate and was hoping for a transfer to the courts before long. Our short conversation brought out the fact that in an area where there is an extensive development programme undertaken by government departments Gramdan workers constitute a permanent link between the ever changing administrators and the villagers. He gave me an essay to read, written as a study while on a post-graduate course, which discussed the change in the role of the B.D.O. since the introduction of Panchayati Raj. It contained much helpful information.

After a tasty but rather hot Gujarati lunch we climbed on to a milk lorry and set off for the village of Manghar by a devious route, depositing a milk churn here, another there. We raised clouds of fine red dust like surf in the wake of a motor-boat, and were soon smothered and stained to look like a group of people in the midst of 'holi' frolics. In the woods where the truck could penetrate no further we were met by the men from Manghar, and together we wound our way along the uneven ground and through jungle paths to a small stream. Across this the villagers had built a low dam with local stone. Already a small reservoir had filled with water. This was to be enlarged by proper construction. The steep gradient would act as a natural force to irrigate the fields in the valley.

We continued our route and soon reached an open plateau on the hill top. I stood and looked down in wonder at the village and the terraced fields below, and felt as Moses must have done when he was shown the promised land. I could barely tear myself away from the view, the rich red soil and pale green of new crops, the darker green of the nearby forests, the ridges of mountain ranges, one beyond the next stretching into the distance.

But time was getting on and there was much talking to be done. We settled in a circle, the figures of the men silhouetted against the sky, behind them the sheer drop down to their village. They told me about Manghar, a small hamlet of 18 Marathi families. All the men are literate and 50% of the women, an achievement since the declaration of Gramdan in 1958, when soon afterwards a constructive worker undertook literacy classes. Of the 40 school-going children 15 are girls,



an encouraging number. Only 40 acres out of 107 are under cultivation. Land has been distributed to four formerly landless families so that every one in the village cultivates some two acres. There is no well in the village, the only source of drinking water a fresh mountain spring.

Land has been terraced, fields have been bunded, and a jungle track widened for easier access to the village. A co-operative society was formed. But in the eyes of the villagers their most valuable asset is the village shop, set up in 1964 with War-on-Want funds. The men claim that they save 50% of their income since they no longer need to waste precious time by walking to Mahableshwar and can utilize this towards higher productivity from their fields. They are not tempted to buy in the bazaar or take refreshment in the cafes, quite apart from the difference in actual prices. A kilo of dal (pulses) in the town costs Rs. 2.05, in the village shop it is only Rs 1.75.

The spokesman was the chairman of the village council. A different villager is the chairman of the panchayat. Manghar is one of several small hamlets forming the panchayat, none of the others having declared Gramdan. No administrative difficulties are experienced except that the big landlords and politicians are unfavourably disposed towards Gramdan development. The village council at Manghar is functioning well and regularly. It helps to solve village differences instead of taking them to court. The men are aware of Gramdan as a national movement and think of themselves as a 'molecule' within it. They are 'inspired by Gramdan and feel its strength'. In spite of economic progress ten men work in Bombay. They would return to the village if there was a livelihood for them. None of the women attended the meeting which was not surprising considering the steep climb and the distance from the village—and early evening is a busy time for them.

Govind Jadho is one of six brothers. He went to a primary school up to the 7th standard—until he was ten years old. He is now 19. The village declared Gramdan when he was twelve. In 1966 he attended a village camp for two months and he is now one of the workers paid by the 'Nirman Samiti'. Production of honey is one of the main village industries. One hundred boxes were supplied to the village co-operative society

which employs twelve people, and 500 boxes have been distributed among 50 villagers, producing 4000 kgs at a gross income of Rs. 16,000. Govind looks after 15 boxes giving him and his family an income of Rs. 900 a year. The bee-keeping centre at Mahabaleshwar pays Rs. 4.20 per kg. After processing the honey it is sold at Rs. 6 a kg. 'Last year, Manghar topped all the villages in India in honey production', the men told me proudly.

Before Gramdan development began Govind's family had an annual income of Rs. 1270. Today it has risen to Rs. 1750. His after cultivates three acres and has doubled his yield by using improved seeds, and both the traditional and Japanese methods of paddy planting. The 17 buffaloes in the village give 80 litres of milk daily, as well as providing organic manure.

Next morning we set off early and reached the historical village of Pratapgarh while the mists were still drifting through the valleys and hung suspended between the mountains. Perched on its hill top it reminded me of Roque Brune on the French Riviera, but instead of looking across olive groves and down on to the Mediterranean I looked across the valleys towards Bombay many miles away. Pratapgarh is a small hamlet of 15 poor houses and 84 people, with a high literacy rate, 40 men and ten women being able to read and write. Shri Dhube told me the village had declared Gramdan in 1966. So far no constructive work has started and no village council has been formed, but he maintained that a co-operative spirit had been created by the people themselves. They were cultivating their land jointly although it had not been redistributed. Their greatest need was drinking water, as there was no well and no nearby spring.

At the top of the last few steps leading up to the entrance of the village stood a small eating place catering for tourists. It was here that I met Dinkar Madhu Puranic, one of the elders of the village, who happened to sit on the bench opposite me.

He was curious to find me in the company of Sarvodaya workers. Why was I here? I told him. Then it was his turn to answer my questions. In 1942 he had worked for the Independence movement. He organised meetings, discussed problems

and 'advocated Gandhi's path' for freeing India. He met Vinoba when he came to Panchgani with Gandhi some time before 1946, and heard about Gramdan eight years ago when the Bhodan workers came to the district. At times he walked with them. His father 'grew rice' in the Kolaba district but, as an absentee landlord, lost his land there under the tenancy law. He now owns ten acres, five of them under cultivation. His greatest difficulty is insufficient land and lack of irrigation. His plans for the future are 'to improve his production'. He would be willing to give 50% of labour in return for aid towards bunding and improved seeds. And he proceeded to tell me about new methods and different varieties of seed. I asked him how he was going to obtain irrigation facilities. He answered that the villagers had one well for twelve acres, that they could not construct more wells as no one knew where to dig, and he had no idea how to get advice and help. He had applied to the government but was told that since the village had declared Gramdan he should approach the 'Gramdan department'. He applied to the 'Nirman Samiti', without success.

I asked Shri Dhube to explain the situation. He told me that until the village became legalised under the Gramdan Act nothing could be done. But he had suggested that the villagers should approach the Block Development Officer. The B.D.O. replied, 'you must apply to the land mortgage bank', but as Dinkar Madhu Puranic pointed out they have no land to mortgage, it now belonged to 'Gramdan'. As the village had not yet been legalised, that is, no title deeds have been transferred from individuals to the village community, an explanation of the situation by some one who knew the facts was obviously necessary. It was not surprising that matters had become too complicated for the old man. Shri Dhube repeated that, until constructive work began, no help would be forthcoming. But there is enough going on in the village for some beginning to be made by at least forming the village council so that the co-operative spirit would not deteriorate for lack of encouragement and action.

As we walked down the hill I had a conversation with young Matkar. Shri Dhube remained silent throughout most of our

stay, and when he did speak it was to complain of his difficulties in looking after seven villages single-handed. I talked to Jayawant Matkar about organising small training camps to develop village leadership, and for training workers to develop such leadership. In one sentence he admitted that they needed such training, to cover up immediately by adding that they knew all about it. Throughout our tour whenever I hit on the true facts of a situation the workers were immediately on the defensive, a natural reaction, but it made constructive discussion rather difficult. On these occasions the presence of Govind Shinde would have been helpful.

On our return to Mahabaleshwar we paid a brief visit to the bee-keeping centre before taking the bus to the small hamlet of Gureghar. We met on the verandah of a roadside building. I looked across the road. 'Whose fields are these'? I asked, pointing at the lush crops which extended over many acres, and was informed that they belonged to a government experimental farm under the soil conservation department.

The people of Gureghar declared Gramdan in 1963, they formed the village council and set up a co-operative society. Out of a total of 150 acres 100 are being cultivated. Bunding and terracing has been undertaken, and a dam constructed which irrigates 30 acres. The main crops are paddy, millet, vegetables and fruit. Three quarters of the vegetables and fruit are sold during the four months' season. Only a few families are engaged in jungle work. Fifty water buffaloes give 70 to 75 litres of milk daily, of which 60 litres are sold. A spring serves for drinking water. A health centre is urgently needed as the only medical facilities are at Panchgani five miles away, or at Mahabaleshwar at a distance of seven miles. Land has been redistributed and the four formerly landless families now own, like everyone else, an average of two acres.

Nearly Rs. 20,000 have been invested in bunding and terracing. The newly constructed dam will allow for double cropping. At present food production is only sufficient for four months. Chemical fertiliser and improved seeds have been introduced, 500 kgs. of chemical fertiliser being used for vegetable and fruit production alone. The village council meets regularly once a week. I was surprised to find that the boy

Govind from Manghar, paid by the 'Nirman Samiti' as one of its workers, had been appointed the secretary of the village council at Gureghar. There is no village fund or village store.

A number of women attended our meeting. They looked clean, smartly turned out and alert. Their greatest concern was lack of food, and 'they would like to learn things'. The nursery teacher in the village was ready to give adult education classes—only 15 women were literate. I wondered why she could not have started before, or if she ever would. But looking at the young village women I felt assured. I did not think they would let the matter rest now that we had talked about it. One of the women owns a sewing machine, and had taken training in sewing at Mahabaleshwar. I asked her if she would be willing to share her machine with the other women and teach them how to stitch. She agreed readily; she was already sewing their clothes for them. This led to the suggestion of forming a women's co-operative society and developing a sewing and tailoring industry which could cater for several villages. The women listened eagerly. Again I wondered how much of their emancipation was due to the close proximity of the village to two health resorts and its situation on the main road.

The meeting broke up, and we walked through the village to look at the raspberry plantation, an unexpected and impressive sight. We sampled some of the sweet fruit, which in contrast to the red berries of Europe are of a mauvish blue shade. The introduction of vegetables and fruit as a cash crop should in time make a tremendous difference to the village economy. At present the condition of the straw huts was glaringly indicative of the existing poverty. Soon we reached the reservoir and small power house—the villagers' pride of achievement.

We walked across the dam on our way to Bhose, a larger village of over 100 families. A jeep belonging to the Soil Conservation Department picked us up and took us the remaining distance. We met the men of Bhose in a building by the roadside. Only a few houses stood nearby, the rest were clustered below in the valley two miles away. Literacy among the men was high, the village had its own school, and the teacher took an active part in our meeting which developed into a most confused discussion. I asked about the shop—I could see grain

being sold at the other end of the building. 'The shop saves time and money', I was told. 'Wheat in town costs Rs. 1.15 per kg., here Rs. 0.62.' 'What kind of shop is it?' No one knew, 'Was it a straightforward village shop?' 'Yes'. 'What could they buy there?' 'Wheat, etc.' 'No, it wasn't an ordinary shop', someone corrected. 'It was a fair price shop'. 'Then it was run by the government?' 'Yes, no!' 'It was a co-operative shop'. So there was a co-operative society in the village, but whether it operated the shop I never found out. 'Was there a village store?' 'No'. 'Was there a village fund?' 'What was a village fund?' I explained, I had to, no one else knew. Long arguments ensued among the villagers and workers about the idea of a village fund. One villager exclaimed: 'We pay money in taxes, we pay money in share capital to the co-operative society, now you are asking us to give more money.' I think I succeeded in convincing the workers of the difference between a village fund and a co-operative society, but I am doubtful if the villagers understood. No one had a clear picture regarding the functions of different village institutions, and I was perturbed at the limited understanding of Gramdan principles among the workers.

The constructive programme here was conducted on much the same lines as at Gureghar.

After the meeting we walked for about a mile to the plateau where it dropped steeply into the valley, and where the village lay cradled among terraced fields. On the way the men told me about their main problem, irrigation. They had a tank and an electric pump received from the B.D.O. This irrigated 60 acres. In the same breath they told me that the government wasn't looking after them. There was no time to descend to the village itself. I would have liked to remain longer and talk further to the men to get to the bottom of all the confusion. But we had promised to call at Bhiler although this was not a Gramdan village. I was more than glad that we went, for our visit helped me to understand the situation in the villages I had seen.

Bhiler was chosen as a model development project by the Soil Conservation Section of the Agricultural Department. Work had started in 1959/60 with outreach into the whole area. Before this there had been nothing here apart from the traditional hill cultivation. Under the direction of the Soil Conser-

vation Officer 100 acres out of a total of 800 have so far been terraced and bunded. By levelling the ground the water table has been raised, wells have been dug and electrical pumps installed. The Department pays for levelling and terracing work, but the farmer undertakes the construction of supporting walls from local stone, to re-inforce the terracing. I spoke to the farmer who showed me his raspberry plantation and electrically driven well. Seven years ago, before the Soil Conservation Department started its work, he harvested Rs. 60 worth of traditional crops from one acre. Today he makes between Rs. 2000 and Rs. 3000 from the same plot of land. I watched the packing and loading of French beans and peas. The quality of the vegetables could not have been better. There is also a poultry research station. A number of farmers in Bhiler and in other villages have taken to egg production. At first they came to the research station for chicks and advice, now many of them buy chicks direct from suppliers, having outgrown their need of advice from the research station. A good many new houses have come up over the last few years, and I learnt that new people have come and settled in the village to work as labourers, and that 50% of the people have signed the Gramdan declaration.

I enjoyed talking to the Soil Conservation Officer in charge of the development programme in Bhiler and in the Satara Block. I got precise answers to my questions from an enterprising man with a trained mind. After the confusion at Bhole this came as a refreshing relief. I was beginning to understand that this particular development programme was largely responsible for the economic changes in the villages I had visited. By declaring Gramdan the villagers were able to give their support in a concerted effort, the village council playing its unifying role; and it was a moot question how much development would have taken place without the activities of the Soil Conservation Department. The Gramdan workers had neither the technical knowledge nor were they trained for the job. Then in what field were they making their contribution? With so much confusion in Bhole and elsewhere, I found it difficult to assess. A certain amount of social change goes hand in hand with economic development. If economic development continued at

its present rate would it outstrip social change on Gramdan lines and make it ineffective? The potentials for development were immense but the responsibility for sustaining the right kind of changing attitude rested with the workers.

On the following day we returned to Poona as scheduled. How hot it seemed after the hills even though it was late November. When I had first come to India in 1945, I was stationed at Poona, then a sleepy little town full of the military. I didn't recognise this thriving and developing city as the same place.

The office had arranged a quick run around the sights for me which I appreciated, while begrudging the time which I had hoped to use in discussion with Govind Shinde. One interesting incident occurred. My guide and driver was a business connection of one of the workers and had no close association with the staff. He took me to see the memorial stones at the site where Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai had been cremated. I turned to him: 'You know, I suppose, that Mahadev's son Narayan is the secretary of the Shanti Sena?' 'Oh, you mean the American Peace Corps', exclaimed the business man. What a sorry state of affairs when foreign volunteers make a greater impact on the community than their own young men.

When I returned to the office I found that Govind Shinde had organised a general meeting at which all office staff and a few outsiders participated. I was disappointed, for this kind of gathering did not allow for the detailed discussion I had hoped for, and which I so badly needed to clarify the many puzzling problems I had encountered. So we talked on general lines; how to obtain new Gramdans, the meaning of the various commitments undertaken by the villagers; how much we could expect of them, and so on. And it became quite clear to me that there was no confusion in Govind Shinde's mind on any of these issues. Was Vinoba's challenge to obtain more Gramdans, Blockdans, Districtdans being met at the cost of consolidation in existing Gramdan villages, at the cost of a sustained constructive programme? In the presence of outsiders and such veteran workers as Shri Saheb Nisai it was difficult for me to raise controversial issues, particularly as I did not know until after the meeting who they were. We never touched on the



problems of the villages we had visited. In the circumstances I could not ask to be shown the accounts and reports which would have helped me to understand what I had seen and been told. No, was there time. For I was whisked away after barely an hour to call on Shri P.H. Patwardhan, a veteran Independence fighter, who had expressed a wish to meet me. I spent a pleasant half hour with him and he talked to me of old times, and the involvement of Quakers in Indian affairs during the Independence struggle. We also talked about Gramdan, but the short and pleasant interlude added nothing to the subject.

Before I left that evening Govind Shinde posed a problem for me: A tribal village of 15 families and 100 people declared Gramdan. The people had little food. Development commenced and food output trebled. The increase of production stimulated consumption and needs. The village has been developed to capacity. Still the people are asking for more. What can be done? I am no economist and can only use my imagination. My immediate reaction to the question was two-fold. Is there such a thing as development to capacity at the level at which we are working? And does it not bring out the justification for area and agro-industrial development on a decentralised but interrelated basis instead of working with an isolated community?

That same evening we took the Goa express from Poona and travelled over-night to Belgaum, the disputed border area, at present within Mysore state but claimed by the Maharashtrians as theirs. Shri Menase, a colleague of Govind Shinde's, met us at the station. His experience dates over many years and covers the whole area administered by the Poona office. From Belgaum we took the bus to Savantwadi, a drive of several hours. I looked at the rolling countryside, gazed at near and distant hills, watched the people at work in the fields. The strong colours of the Satara district had changed to a mellow blending of sepias, ochres, yellows and pale greens. Villages no longer nestled in tight clusters but were scattered in a park-like setting, a house here, a house there, instilling a sense of dreamlike peace.

At the small town of Savantwadi we were joined by Vijay Gopal Narkar and Shivarani Bhau Jadhav of the Sarvodaya centre at Kudal. We had a much needed bath and a meal

before once more climbing on to a bus for the drive to Kerwade where we were to stay the night. The bus station was packed to bursting point with villagers and their chattels, returning from a day's marketing or work to their outlying villages. Buses were leaving in many directions and at a few minutes' interval. No railway operates in the Ratnagiri district, and a wide network of bus routes connects many villages over pukka and kutchra roads alike. On the latter the dust rises in clouds and descends on passengers and passers-by, like showers of red rain.

It was late when we reached Kerwade and the workers' centre. I mistook the few buildings which stood out in the half-light of the falling dusk to be the village and asked to be shown around before it was completely dark. Three of us set off along a wide path. We were talking as we walked, and 've had gone a furlong or more when I realised that we had left those few buildings behind and that no other houses were in sight. I stopped. 'Where is the village?' I asked. 'We tried to explain to you', Shri Menase pointed out, 'that the centre of this widely dispersed village is two miles away. We shall be going there after our evening meal for a meeting with the villagers but you insisted on going now as well'. I felt ashamed at not having listened properly. I had been so anxious to see something of the village activities while it was still light that I never understood what everyone was trying to tell me.

But our abortive attempt had been worthwhile. It gave me an opportunity of seeing something of the charcoal industry and of having this explained to me, as well as for a quiet talk with Shri Menase at the village shop-cum-cafe a few yards away from the centre. We settled on a rickety bench, drank hot syrupy tea and munched sweet suji gullas, a sweet made from semolina, while he gave me a background picture of the area. We also talked about the Kolaba and Satara districts and he agreed with many of my impressions.

I never saw Kerwade in day light. Instead I had the experience of walking the two miles by the beams of kerosene lamps, of sitting in the forecourt of the village temple among the gaudily draped idols and the more soberly attired villagers. In the flickering light and dancing shadows of the lamps it was

difficult to know who was of flesh and blood, what of painted plaster, and I found myself now and again addressing gods and goddesses.

The hundred families live in houses widely scattered among the 2500 acres of forest land. Out of this 650 acres are under paddy and vegetable cultivation. A further 100 acres will come under the plough shortly, and of these 60 will be irrigated by a kerosene engine, lifting river water. After the declaration of Gramdan a village co-operative society and a forest labourers' co-operative society were formed, the latter with aid from War-on-Want funds. The forest labourers' co-operative society performs a most important function in stopping exploitation of the villagers by forest contractors, which had been the scourge of the district. The society organises labour—it employs between 100 and 150 people—and pays regular wages. With additional funds hundreds more could be employed. The forest department in the district is lax and allows free exploitation of forest wealth by private contractors. Well organised labour societies could put a stop to this malpractice.

The villagers seemed to be satisfied with their progress. They also wanted to know about me and asked direct questions, showing an interest in others than themselves, in a life beyond the closed circle of the surrounding forests.

I loved our leisurely walk back, a last drink of cool water, and lying peacefully by a tiny window which looked out into the trees. Now and then I caught a glimpse of a star blinking through tight branches. I felt as in a fairy tale wood, and fell asleep to the imaginary music of Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel opera.

We caught the bus again at 6 o'clock next morning and I saw many of the same faces from the previous afternoon, returning for work to Savantwadi. I remembered one woman in particular who had sat opposite me, our knees touching. Every half hour or so she pulled from within the folds of her clothes a small cloth-wrapped bag, the size and shape of a victorian lavender bag. In it she had all the necessary ingredients for preparing 'pan', the betel leaf, the grated areca nut and other spices. She placed the leaf into the palm of her hand, sprinkled the other ingredients on it, deftly folded it into a little green

parcel, and popped it with relish into her almost toothless mouth. She chewed and chewed until the collecting juices necessitated a well-aimed expulsion past my nose and out of the bus window.

After a few miles we got off the bus and sat by the road side amongst the fields and forest land until another bus came along and took us off in a different direction and to Nivaje.

My visit to Nivaje was most worthwhile, possibly because we were there for several hours and during day light. It is another fair-sized village of more than 100 families. Gramdan was declared in 1958, and constructive work began a year later. Natural springs are being used for irrigation, which allows for considerable double cropping. The village council was keen on education as only 25% of the villagers were literate. So they collected the necessary funds and with free labour built a school. On completion the government appointed a teacher. I saw the school and spoke to the teacher. The children looked at me with saucer-like eyes while the teacher struggled with a few words of English. There is also a health centre in the village. Under the government family planning programme twelve men recently underwent vasectomy and two women had loop insertions. I looked at the well-stocked village shop opened in 1966 with War-on-War funds. Nivaje is a long way from the nearest bazaar and the shop makes a great difference to the people.

We continued our walk through the village. I watched some men ploughing a plot of land with their bullocks. 'These men belong to a group of 14 who cultivate 65 acres co-operatively', I was told. 'They are just breaking for their mid-day meal. Come and meet them'. So we moved on to a well-constructed mud house belonging to 38-year-old Nander Narayan Pingolka, a Bandari by caste. He belonged to another village where his family owned two acres. These are not enough to feed a great many hungry mouths. So he came along and joined the communal farming experiment as a labourer. The 65 acres of land belonged to eleven families. Yields are distributed amongst the members according to the manpower they put in. There is one other landless worker among the group. Under the community farming scheme they all call themselves cultivators and no difference is made between them.

Pingolka had to take a loan to pay his share instead of making a land contribution. He is a short stocky little man and did most of the talking, whether because we were sitting on the verandah of his house or because he was a natural leader I couldn't tell. He said that he was much better off today. I asked him if he would like to return to his own village. 'I built my house here', he simply stated with a wide gesture at the building. 'In my village', he continued, 'a non-Gramdan one, people only look after their own interests, whereas here people think about the community as a whole'. He had no agricultural experience and had joined in the communal farming project on the advice of the local worker, but he learnt fast and now knew what he was talking about. The other men, who were now joining us, corroborated what he was saying.

I asked about future plans. They all wanted education for their children and to put more and more energy into increasing agricultural production. Pingolka was keen to start poultry and dairy farming, buy agricultural implements, two bullocks, an iron plough and a sowing machine. I asked him if he or any of the others knew how to maintain machinery? 'No', he replied, 'but we can be trained'. Improved implements would save time. How would they utilise this time? 'Now we don't conduct agriculture scientifically', Pingolka said; 'when we have machinery we can begin inter-cultivation, bunding and make other improvements. So much is left undone which is necessary for increasing our yield.' They would like to take up a loan to speed up development. Shri Menase explained to the men how to prepare a proper budget prior to applying for a loan. It then emerged that some years ago a credit society had existed between five villages. This had become defunct. A new society could not be formed until the old one was liquidated, and this could not happen until the former loan, now a debt of Rs 20,000, was repaid. It was therefore better to wait until the village becomes legalised under the Gramdan Act and the village council credit-worthy.

I had assumed that this small group of farmers was well on the way to some measure of prosperity, only to be thoroughly shaken by their final statement. 'We are so much better off now, we have sufficient food for eight to nine months in the year'.

This more than anything else brought out the stark reality of the situation. For the Westerner, living in an affluent society, 'being so much better off' has a completely different connotation. Here it simply means poverty of a lesser degree.'

We moved on and looked in at the nursery class of 20 children. 'Jai Hind', they all shouted as we approached, and raised their hands, palms together, in greeting. The present teacher, paid by the Kasturba Trust, has been in Nivaje for three weeks. She has come from a non-Gramdan village. 'Did you find any difference working there and here?' I asked. She thought for a moment. 'Yes', she said, 'although the previous village had a higher literacy rate, the parents were non-co-operative and the children less disciplined. But the women at Nivaje are not interested in literacy for themselves'. She placed importance on cleanliness, she told us, but had not thought of having a latrine for the children. A few years ago the Gandhi Memorial Trust constructed five latrines in the village, but after a short period of use the people returned to the fields and there was doubt about the success of a latrine programme even now.

A midwife shares the teacher's quarters at the 'centre'. The two women prepared a simple and tasty meal for us and afterwards we had a women's meeting in the large room. They came in colourful saris, beautifully groomed with tidy, shining hair. There is one Harijan family in the village who lives at such a distance that it has been impossible to integrate them fully. But the fifteen Christian families participate in the village functions and activities. The women have no actual society of their own, but they come together when there is need and settle their disputes among themselves. One woman knows how to spin, two how to sew. So once again we mapped out together a programme which would be both interesting, entertaining and productive. Would it ever materialise?

During the course of the day I was introduced to one of the workers whose job it was to collect repayments of loans from the various co-operative societies in the villages to make sure that they would not default, as had happened in the case of the credit society.

When it was time to leave I was ushered to an ancient saloon car with sagging springs and axles just above the ruts of

the village tracks on which we now proceeded. We squeezed in, luggage and all, and whereas in England no such car would be allowed on the roads, let alone move, here it just plodded on and ejected us again on to some sandy track from where we walked the two miles to the Naneli centre. I must have been tired by then for I remember very little about this visit, except that we sat on the verandah of the worker's humble dwelling while I asked questions and he told me about the work at Naneli.

• Naneli is composed of four hamlets of which two have declared Gramdan. All four belong to the same panchayat. The two Gramdan hamlets have a population of 250 people, 23 families, the other two hamlets 350 people. In the Gramdan hamlets ten acres of land have been distributed to five landless families. Feelings between the different sections are strained although the non-Gramdan hamlets have improved their lot along with the Gramdan ones. Three groups in the Gramdan hamlets are cultivating their land communally. The panchayat committee arranged a loan to benefit eleven families. The money paid for an irrigation pump which made double cropping possible, and already half of the amount has been repaid. All four hamlets received Rs. 17,000 from the 'Nirman Samiti', part of which has also been repaid. In 1964, under the Gramdan development scheme, the Co-operative Bank arranged a reducing loan of Rs. 11,000, and the Community Development Department Rs. 22,000. A horticultural society was formed in all four hamlets and 250 acres of fallow land are being reclaimed under a government scheme for mango, chikoo, banana and pineapple production to supply a canning factory. Work commenced a year ago.

It was nearly dark by the time we walked back to the car and I could see very little of the development work on either side of the path. As I trailed behind the others, villagers passed me on their way home returning from working in the fields. They stared at me and I stared back at them and we smiled at one another. The cattle too were making for home.

The car delivered us safely at Kudal and at the Sarvodaya office. Kudal is one of those places which is neither village nor town. It has a sprawling bazaar, a bus station and various small

scale industries. I was taken to see the flaying centre. This employs six people full time, one man part-time. Of the six, five are chamars (cobblers) by caste, following their traditional occupation, making shoes and chappals from the skins. In Kudal only bone meal is produced from the carcasses. Shri Menase told me that he thought flaying centres should be situated in large towns to utilise the whole of the carcass which can only be done with some machinery. An all-India survey showed that only a third of carcasses are utilised at present, and this represents a tremendous waste for the Indian economy. And he explained: 'The flesh produces organic fertiliser, the skeleton bonemeal, the fat is used for soap-making, the hoofs produce oils for watches and glue, the hair is made into brushes and the horns into combs and craft articles. As few as ten large animals a year would justify the setting up of such an industry'. At Kudal therefore the flaying centre is a rather half-hearted affair.

I also looked in at the spinning centre which employs a few people but seemed to me a long way from Gandhi's idea of village-oriented Khadi production. And lastly I visited the poultry unit in the compound of a small and pleasant bungalow which had once seen better times. Mr. Rane is in charge. He left his job in Bombay some years ago and took a government course in poultry farming. The 'Nirman Samiti' asked him to take over the deep litter unit at Kudal in 1966, and invested Rs. 6000. He started with 250 ten-week-old chicks. Some of these were sold and today he has 165 laying birds (browns) giving 120 large eggs a day of an average weight of 60 gms. For the first seven months he received a salary. Since then he has worked on a basis whereby he retains the profits from the sale of eggs and pays interest to the 'Nirman Samiti' on the Rs. 6000 originally invested. I was reminded of Mr. Kolhatkar at Savarsai when Mr. Rane explained that the unit was too small to be profitable. Up to now he has introduced about nine or ten villagers to poultry farming and more people have ordered chicks from him for deep litters. His wife and children have joined enthusiastically into the enterprise. He was full of ideas for publicising deep litter poultry farming, the nutritional value of eggs, and how to utilise them. But the whole project



may collapse unless it is put on a sound commercial basis. If this happened, it would fail in its purpose of demonstrating to farmers the commercial possibilities of poultry farming at a time when there is a considerable change in people's attitude towards accepting the 'vegetarian' or unfertilised egg in their diet.

I was by now getting saturated with impressions of villages and village histories, and almost reluctant to see anything more. Another severe attack of dysentery was not exactly helpful. So many details that I collected were similar, so many programmes identical, yet no two villages were ever alike.

In 1957 when Ovaeliye Taluka declared Gramdan, the village had no roads, no school, no drinking water, not even a panchayat was functioning. When Madhukar Tirodkar arrived soon afterwards he set up the village council, then called a meeting. A working committee and a president were elected. A decision was taken to construct two wells and three miles of approach roads between the three small hamlets constituting the village of 101 families. One well was financed by the Block Office, the second with money raised by the villagers. In ten years the literacy rate increased from 45% in 1957 to 75% in 1967, with twice as many women as men, due to the fact that many of the men work in Bombay. It is said that a seventh of the population of Bombay come from the Ratnagiri district, emphasising the dire poverty and lack of local employment opportunities. A midwife conducts a clinic. No doctor ever calls, only a dispensary van comes once a week within a distance of three miles.

Here too the Soil Conservation Department was undertaking development. Cashew-nut trees were planted in 500 acres two years ago. Sixty per cent of the seedling trees survived and will bear fruit after five years. Cashew nuts are one of the main cash crops and their cultivation should make a considerable difference to the village economy. Meanwhile the villagers derive their main income from charcoal production. They conduct their own contracting business through the co-operative society which was formed with War-on-Want funds. At one time, outside contractors advanced money to the villagers during the rainy season when there was always a shortage of food. A

contract was drawn up on 'spec' and in the event the villagers lost 50% of their legitimate income. Today their income from the charcoal industry amounts to between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 6000 a year. Fifty acres of fallow land have been terraced and banded and are irrigated for double cropping by a 'nullah'. The land is communally farmed. The project was financed by the 'Nirman Samiti', a loan from the Bank, and funds raised in the village. Food sufficiency has gone up from three to four months to eight to nine months in ten years. But here too there is no village store or village fund.

We left Ovaeliye Taluka by a motorable road which the villagers had built to provide communication with the outside world, and drove to the large village of Walaval comprising 4000 people and 22 small hamlets. Of these eighteen declared Gramdan in 1958. Since 1961 spinning units have been conducted in two hamlets, and the women take either payment for their spun yarn or exchange it for cloth. A flaying and shoe-making industry was started in another hamlet supplying the local market. A co-operative society is functioning. More than 1000 men from Walaval work in Bombay. A recently opened government coconut fibre industry employs so far only three people at Rs. 1.50 per day for women, and Rs. 2.00 for men, but when fully operating will give work to 27 people. The waste is sold at Rs. 1.00 per 35 lbs. bag to the villagers for organic fertiliser. At the same time the plant buys coconut husks at Rs. 20 per 1000, and has a capacity to deal with 2500 husks a day.

At the river side I admired a powerful pump lifting river water for irrigation purposes. Trade in the bazaar was brisk, at least at the time of my visit—late afternoon. People were coming and going from across the other side of the river in precariously over-loaded boats. I paid a visit to the large and ancient village temple, sadly lacking in cleanliness and, at least for me, in any kind of atmosphere conducive to meditation and prayer. 'It only gets cleaned up for special festivals', explained my guide.

The last day of my tour took me to Gopuri, the ashram started by Apasahib Patwardhan in 1948; Shri Gagalkar is the present manager. The purpose of the ashram was to give employment and to prevent people from seeking work in Bom-

bay. Today it is a flourishing farm. Bananas, papaya, guavas, mangoes, chikoo and vegetables are grown in quantity. Two and a half acres produce 40 maunds (3200 lbs) of rice per acre with new varieties and double cropping. Eighteen years ago these same acres produced seven maunds (560 lbs). Most of the vegetables are sold in the neighbourhood and the local market, about a mile and a half away, bringing an income of Rs. 20,000 a year. At present there are 23 members in the ashram community of whom 14 are working members, five are women and the rest children.

The day begins at 5 a.m. with kitchen work. This is followed by gardening and other field work until breakfast from 7 to 7.30 a.m., and consists of rice or wheat porridge, fruit, some root or other vegetable and chapattis. Work continues until 1.30, for some in the fields, for others in the dairy or the flaying centre, or selling produce in the bazaars. Then it is time for baths and the midday meal of rice, chapattis, vegetables and curds, followed by kitchen work and rest until 2 p.m. The afternoon is spent once more in outdoor work until 6 p.m. The evening meal, very much like the midday one, is taken from 7 to 7.45 p.m. followed by prayers, writing of diaries, spinning and other indoor pursuits until bed time at 10 p.m.

The flaying centre has recently been discontinued. Four years ago 200 animals were dealt with annually. The skins were sold to the cobblers for tanning and making shoes and chappals. The dairy has ten cows. Two are in milk giving two litres daily. A Sindhi bull was bought ten months ago to improve the herd, which is housed in exceptionally good stables.

The fields, vegetables and fruit plantations were a most impressive sight. Carpentry was of a high standard. A good latrine programme is also in operation. Some modern techniques are employed, but at the same time many old and outdated implements are still in use. An electrically driven pump is used for irrigation. Shri Gagalkar explained that the installation of electricity was worth the cost of Rs. 7000, for running costs come to Rs. 50 per month whereas with oil they would be three times as much.

The main object of the ashram today is 'to make a go' of community living according to Sarvodaya philosophy. All

fourteen working members have been here for at least three years, some of them since the beginning. Among them were farm labourers, some had been in one or other of the services, some were students. It is the labourers who tend to leave again to earn higher wages elsewhere, so that people are always coming and going. And, of course, difficulties within the community are experienced from time to time.

Shri Gagalkar admitted frankly that there was no outreach either spiritually or practically. The 1300 villagers of Gopuri are their friends, nothing more. They are not Gramdanis. He himself does not think Gramdan has produced any change, nor has he or his colleagues tried to bring about any change within the village. 'If one wishes to make an ashram self-supporting', he said, 'one cannot do outreach work at the same time.'

I suppose people have the right to live their lives according to their own principles and beliefs, but I asked myself again if India, and the Sarvodaya movement, can afford the luxury of self-contained inward-looking communities. If Gopuri was to become a training institute for village youth it could make a tremendous impact on the neighbourhood. The base farm is there to demonstrate what can be done with new methods and diligence. The buildings are there. What is lacking is a new approach, new policies and new directives. But who would dare to take Bhan Gagalkar's life work from him, a dedicated and honest man who has the courage to speak out and to administer the ashram according to his convictions?

That evening we had a meeting of the workers in the area. Some twenty or more came, good ones, indifferent ones, and those who were natural leaders. We went step by step through Gramdan principles, talked about the difficulties in implementing some of them, and about local conditions. I was worried in case my insistence on clear answers, on forcing the men to give an honest appraisal, might hurt their feelings. 'Why should we mind', I was told, 'when you are sincere?' No comment could have made me happier.

As a special treat I was sent to Goa for a day's holiday before returning to Bombay and the north. We made an early start

and I rose at 5 a.m., bathed and dressed by the dim light of an oil lamp. We trudged along the road to the bus stop at Kudal and were immediately smothered in the fine red dust which we kicked up with our feet. We reached Savantwadi and there changed on to the Goa bus.

For most Indians, even today, as much as for me, the thought of going to Goa is tinged with a sense of high expectation. What would it be like? Would it be different? As our bus drove along mile after mile of road I noticed no change in the beautiful countryside which had been with me now for several days. There was the same red soil, the green of coconut palms, cashewnut and beetle-nut trees, paddy fields and other crops under a pale blue sky. At the frontier a board welcomed us to Goa in English. On the opposite side of the road stood a crumbling Catholic church in sad isolation. After another few miles we reached the check point at Bicholim. In 1961 a few Indian bombs had fallen here and tanks had entered. The few shelled-out buildings were barely noticeable. People and vegetation had overrun broken walls and gaping holes, life being more violent than the ruins left by violence itself.

Still the countryside was the same. But amongst the likenesses now stood houses and bungalows built in Portuguese style with a charm all their own, built by a different people representing a different culture. They all had steps leading up to the porch whose columns invariably ended in two inviting stone seats.

At Mhapasa, a town of some 8000 people, we left the bus. My Indian poultry farmer friend and his wife who had become my companions for this trip, had brought with them 250 new-laid eggs from Kudal to be delivered to a customer at Mhapasa. As he explained, there was a good market here to be explored, more easily accessible than Bombay. But in Mhapasa most provision shops had remained closed on that day in protest against an increase in sugar prices. What to do? Actually there was no problem. We wandered around the bazaar until we had located one of the many friends every Indian has in every town he visits. His shop was open. He sold kerosene, and the surroundings in which we sipped a cool drink were not exactly romantic. But the colourful market scene was ample

compensation. I had no longer any doubt about being in Goa. "Who are the women in Western dress?" I asked. 'Are they of mixed Portuguese and Indian marriages?' 'Oh no', I was told, 'they are pure Christians'. I was amazed to learn that these pure Christians had retained the caste system, that there were Brahmin Christians and other caste Christians who adhered as rigidly to social and marriage laws as their Hindu brethren.

After a while we said good-bye to our kerosene friend, collected our bags and wound our way through the rows of fruit vendors and shoppers to the taxi stand. We shared a taxi with another party, and were driven to Betim where we crossed the Khandepar river by a ferry boat to Panjim, the capital. On disembarking we once more gathered our belongings and walked in the hot sun to a street corner where wife and I were deposited while husband went looking for the cousin who also seems to be living in every town any Indian visits. Cousin had gone to lunch but husband remembered a place where he had stayed on a former visit. So off we walked again, a little boy coolie carrying my case and bed roll to the Indian style 'hotel' owned by a pleasant Gujarati. It seemed ludicrous staying with a Gujarati in Goa and eating hot Gujarati food; almost like ordering fish and chips in a French hotel on a day trip from Dover to Calais. But the hotel was clean. Wife and I shared a room. It had two beds in it and a mirror as well as strip lighting. This seemed sheer luxury after the three previous nights spent on the floor and by the light of oil lamps, in the company of several male companions.

I fell on my bed for a mid-day siesta and my bones rejoiced in its comparative softness.

At 2.30 husband went off to find a taxi to take us around the 'sights'. Half an hour later he returned with cousin and cousin's neighbour who was a taxi driver. We started. We drove to cousin's house where we had to take tea. 'When does it get dark?' I asked, remembering my proposed sight-seeing tour of Bhubaneswar which never materialised.

But I need not have worried. I was taken to old Goa first. By sheer coincidence, we visited the Basilika of Bom Jesus on the eve of the Saint's day of St. Xavier. A fair was in full swing. People were camping in and around the cloisters, bringing the

noisy temple atmosphere into the hallowed silence of the church.

I visited the Mangesh temple in Priol with its exquisite silverwork, so much more tasteful than the ornate gold of the Basilika. I saw the Shanta Durga temple at Kawlem, the Shri Jahalsa temple at Mardol and the Shri Nagesh temple. Again I was fortunate for this was the day when the idol was taken out in procession, and we witnessed the Hindu crowd and Hindu fair as we had earlier the Christians. We bought some special feast-day sweets, made of ground pulses dipped in syrup, and munched them as our taxi returned to Panjim in the falling dusk, past hills and through little towns, past temples and shrines. Outside the main church at Panjim a police band and another brass band were alternately entertaining the crowd with Western music. The shop signs in the streets were a mixture of Portuguese and Hindi. Motor-cars of every make and pre-liberation vintage were an unusual sight. People around us talked in English, Goanese, Kannada, Marathi. Goa, a cosmopolitan island still untouched by the sophistication of Bombay, is being developed as a tourist centre. With its beaches of golden sands, its glorious scenery, a climate that rarely soars beyond 92 degrees, with its churches, temples and forts telling its ancient history, Goa has much to offer.

I never like to miss anything and had chosen to return to Bombay by boat, a twenty hour trip. I bought myself a deck space and spent the day digesting the many and varied impressions of the last ten days. In Goa I had been unable to contact the Sarvodaya workers as there had not been sufficient time to inform them of my visit. In any case there is not much work going on just yet. I spent the day thinking, dreaming, watching the coast line of the Konkan drifting past, gazing at the crowds embarking at charming little ports, and talking or rather being talked to. I met a South Indian Brahmin hotel manager who told me 'Of course, I eat eggs, they are vegetarian', indicating that even in his caste food habits were changing. This led to a lively exchange of views on religion. I met a Goanese Christian girl living abroad with her husband, who confirmed my information about the Christian caste structure. I talked to a Muslim girl who told the three of us about her thwarted love affair with a Muslim boy of whom her father did

not approve. 'He locked me up in our house for one whole year', she said. 'And when he allowed me to go out again he threatened me that if I met the boy against his wish or ran away with him, he would not only shoot me but also my mother. What could I do? I met him once by accident in the street and we were seen by neighbours. I was beaten and locked up again'. She lowered her voice as her father was approaching. 'You don't believe me', she said, 'I'll prove it to you,' and she turned to her father and pulled a stout service revolver from his hip pocket.

At the next port the whole town must have come on board. Where I had stretched out for the night people began to sit on my head and feet. My three friends, Brahmin, Muslim and Christian girl, came to my rescue and made room for me on their side of the boat. Shall I ever forget the warm-hearted kindness of strangers whom I met on my travels?

I left Bombay for Delhi by the Punjab Mail. At the beginning of December the harsh cold of the north Indian plain struck through to my bones as soon as the sun went down. How much more friendly had been the temperate climate of the places I had just visited, and how incredibly beautiful!

When the problems of India are so overpoweringly oppressive the beauty of the countryside restores one to a mood of optimism. Again and again I had been uplifted by a sense of sheer joy and aesthetic pleasure as I walked in the hills and valleys of Mahabaleshwar or the park-like setting of Ratnagiri. Are the people in the villages aware of it too? Does it help or hinder in the struggle for survival? Poverty was as great here as anywhere else, and the tremendous effort for increase in production only too obvious. In the face of this I found it almost impossible to know how much of the achievements in the villages was due to government projects or to the influence of Gramdan. But one thing is sure, Gramdan has been instrumental in consolidating and supporting government initiative. Over-all programmes differed little from extension programmes in non-Gramdan villages. The centres worked on similar lines to those laid down by the community development programmes



and by the Central Social Welfare Board. Given the same number of staff would non-Gramdan villages have succeeded to the same extent? If one believes that Gramdan has something else to offer, then the answer is doubtful.

What then has been the Gramdan contribution? It is clear that the formation of the village council has helped in unifying the villagers in communal efforts. The workers help in negotiations between the village council and government or other officials, and allay mistrust and fear. The villagers have become conscious that they can succeed today by united efforts where they failed previously as individuals or by belonging to factions. Non-governmental funds have helped to form co-operative societies for the purpose of attracting loans and furthering objectives decided upon by the village council, and not by one or other faction. Benefits are therefore more equally distributed. Pride in achievement is felt by all the villagers and not just by a few individuals, and spurs them to greater efforts. Exploitation through money-lenders and other corruptive influences has lessened. Drunkenness in many villages has practically stopped.

From the lengthy discussions with the workers several facts emerged.

There is a strong co-operative movement in all three districts. Co-operative societies established before the declaration of Gramdan continue and new ones are being formed for the purpose of credit facilities, until such time when the Gramdan villages become legalised and the village council a credit-worthy unit. But the formation of co-operative societies conflicts with the basic principle of setting up a village fund. In the mind of the villager the village fund means an additional financial burden for which he cannot see any justification. The same applies to the principle of establishing a village store. Village and fair-price shops have likewise confused the issue. There is no understanding of the Gandhian principle of village-oriented khadi or any practical application of establishing decentralised interrelated village industries on a sound economic pattern. The industries that are there function in isolation. Villages which have declared Gramdan within the last year or two are left in abeyance until legalisation under the Gramdan Act; even the village council is not constituted. The workers

find themselves under pressure to obtain new Gramdans to fulfil the expected quota. Most of them do so with reluctance, for they feel it is at the cost of existing constructive work and promoting new work. Workers tend to belittle work done outside the movement and are inclined to discount achievements other than their own. It makes them appear self-satisfied whereas a good deal of self-criticism is going on. This is unfortunate, for it makes for narrowness of outlook and inhibits any wish for obtaining a wider knowledge, which is both essential and desirable.

Their repetitive cry: We are only 160 workers for 3000 Gramdan villages, brings out two further points.

Firstly, anyone who supports the Sarvodaya movement and believes in the potentials of Gramdan to bring about change can join and will most likely be placed into a job after some often cursory training. He is there by his own volition and not by selection. As instances men and women have been known to join for the sake of a job and income, and for no other consideration. The result is that in many cases the workers' intelligence is below that of the villagers, creating an imbalance which leads to difficulties and tensions.

Secondly, the worker has no clear concept that he must choose between recruiting workers among the villagers or creating new leadership. Because he feels himself overburdened and unable to give sufficient attention to the many demands made upon his limited time and talents, he seeks to bring out new workers and thereby deprives the village of the youth or man who could become the catalyst to bring about new leadership within the village, as in the case of Govind Jadho at Manghar. New workers are necessary but not at the price of strong village leadership.

There is another consideration. In the majority of villages that I visited Sarvodaya constructive workers have been active for nearly ten years. Has there been sufficient social and economic change over this period? The only way to assess results and compare these with progress in non-Gramdan villages would be an evaluation and breakdown of inputs in kind, in human effort and finance, an almost impossible task. If one looks at the finances available to government projects and

those at the disposal of the Sarva Seva Sangh, even taking into account government loans, then the results obtained by Gandhian constructive workers amount to a sizable contribution to rural development.

Had this been my first tour I think I would have been thrilled at what I had seen instead of being left with a sense of disquiet. I believe the reason for this is my deeper understanding of Gramdan; I set my sights too high. But I still believe that given sufficient impetus, inspiration and orientation at the lower level the Gramdan villages in the Western Ghats could make a far greater impact in their area and show what Gramdan is about.

I left Varanasi for Sevagram on a cold North Indian winter's day, together with hundreds of Muslims who had chosen this very day to start on their pilgrimage to Mecca. The coaches were packed, the platform crowded with friends and relatives. At stations all through the daylight hours Muslims were gathered, they poured into the train to wish the pilgrims God Speed and to shower them with gifts. At 3 o'clock in the morning the train drew to a halt somewhere—nowhere. At 5 o'clock it was still stationary. By then the cold was penetrating and windows frosted over. Another hour and a relief engine put the train once more into motion. So the Varanasi Express which is always supposed to run to time on its first lap reached Itarsi late. I missed the early connection, and when I got to Wardha at seven o'clock in the evening, no one was there to meet me. I climbed into a tonga and we trotted through the night into the unknown. I felt apprehensive. To be honest, I had not wanted to go. What would I find? Sevagram, the institution, Sevagram, the basic school, the farm, the dairy, the experiment in this and that, the workshop and training scheme under German voluntary aid, the community of workers—reactionary or progressive? Sevagram, a dot on the tourist map, a centre of attraction for world travellers to trespass, to give or to take away? Had it become a hallowed shrine, a lifeless museum, a temple for the devoted or the crackpots? The night held no answer. Lights flickered in the distance. 'There Sevagram', the tonga wallah pointed his whip and bestowed on me his toothless smile. Shortly afterwards we arrived. I noticed a few buildings, trees and shadowy faces. I heard the strumming notes of the sitar, the sound of young voices raised in prayer and song.

Helping hands took my luggage and quietly motioned me. I took off my chappals and slipped into the room to sit on the mat beside Asha Devi, recent widow of Aryanayakam. Asha Devi and her husband have given a lifetime of devotion to Sevagram, to implementing Gandhi's ideas and to keeping his memory alive. She put her hand on my arm with a gentle pressure of welcome, and with this one small gesture uneasiness left me. In the dim light of the 'diva' and the scented air of joss sticks peace stole over me and happiness to be here.

• It must be a special occasion, I thought, for I could dimly discern a heap of 'ladooos' (ball shaped Indian sweets). Perhaps it was the association of ideas produced by my rumbling tummy. For when the lights went up at the end of the prayer meeting my 'ladooos' transformed themselves into skeins of yarn, spun by the community and placed there in humble offering.

It was still cool at 10 o'clock on a January morning and no hot sun diffused the clear outlines of the simple buildings surrounding the gravelled square, its edges shadowed by trees. 'This is the hut which Mira Bahin built for Bapu, this is where he came first in 1936', said the voice of Asha Devi beside me. We entered. Mud and bamboo had created a work of art. With my fingers I traced the mud designs of flowers framing the recesses in the walls, reminiscent of patterns that centuries ago had been immortalised in marble and precious stones on the Taj Mahal.

'It is here Kasturba had her cot', explained Asha Devi. She had been edged into a small corner of another building by an ever-growing crowd, come to listen and to work with Gandhiji.

'And this is Bapu's hut, left exactly as it had been in his lifetime'. Asha Devi led me through the wooden door with panels of woven rush, dove-tailed together without nails. Gandhiji's staff and wooden sandals stood in a tall glass vase by its side. 'They were stolen once', she said; 'formerly they were placed here just as he had done every time he walked through this door.' With her words, Gandhi's image sprang into focus with a vital force and entered with us. It was there on the white khadi-covered mattress on the floor, resting on the pillow against the wall. We sat opposite under the picture of Jesus Christ, the only picture in the room. 'Mahadev Desai used to

sit here, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur there; the children would crowd in on the doorstep, and others would come and go'. Here he met the great and the humble, and here history was made.

If I took a photograph now, I thought, the shadow of his presence would be outlined on my negative.

In the evening I returned to the square and joined the community in prayers, facing the spot where Bapu had sat and led the crowd. To my left stood the building now occupied by Nirmula and Ram Das Gandhi. What must it be like to live under the shadow of such a father, to return and retire here? There was no light; only millions of stars, pin-pointing the sky above, threw a warm glow over shadowy figures and folded hands. Voices raised in song, chirping crickets, and the rustle of leaves in the trees, blended with the stillness of the night, and the sweet scent of white blossom drifted through the air. A dog walked out of the darkness, stood, listened, turned circles on the empty mat beside me in the way dogs have, lay down and remained silent.

The meeting ended. People moved, and carried the murmur of their voices away into their lighted huts, leaving the square to itself wrapped in the past.

Next morning I came back to say good-bye. I walked into Bapu's hut, I picked up the Vedic scriptures on the shelf next to his mattress, and by its side the thumbed copy of his Bible. I stood outside in the sun-light alone, yet amongst the crowd of people who had known Bapu.

January 30, 1948. Twenty years ago, a shot, a violent act and death. Today, twenty years later — a living memory. Ten more years, thirty, fifty, Gandhi will have passed into history. The young don't know, the old forget.

I walked away quietly and at peace, conscious of having had an infinitesimal part in epoch-making events simply by having been alive at that time, glad that I came and grateful for an enriching experience.

But I had not been idle all the time, simply allowing myself the luxury of emotional impressions. One of the young workers took me over the compound, showed me the farm, the orchard and vineyard, the poultry unit, the dairy, weaving shed and

workshop. I had been asked to consider the possibility of developing another agricultural institute here. Bearing in mind the aims and objects of such an institute my first reaction was negative. Even with a new policy and administrative changes Sevagram attracts too many visitors, both foreign and indigenous, for an intensive integrated training programme to develop undisturbed. It will always remain a show place, with unsettling effects on trainees and staff alike. The present pupils of the basic school do not apply their training once they have left Sevagram except in a few cases when they become Sarvodaya workers. The workshop programme under West German auspices is an experiment which will still have to prove itself. There is a communal kitchen for staff and children. Meals are prepared by the latter and are nutritionally inadequate through lack of funds. The near proximity of a government school does not help the development of the basic school.

Yet in spite of these negative criticisms Sevagram needs to be looked at in a special way. Its historical association with Gandhiji, the amount of development which has gone on over the years—a 40 acre farm, the dairy, the poultry, the hospital, and last not least the close proximity of a planned development in the Wardha District with which Annasahib Saraswebudhe is closely linked, demand that Sevagram should make a full contribution in the field of rural development. The Gandhi Centenary presents a challenge and the opportunity to establish a training institute worthy of his memory.

I boarded the train again at Wardha and immediately realised that I was going South. Everyone in my bogey was bound for Tamilnad or Kerala, and spoke in English. After a few hours' travelling the familiar cry of 'garam chah' (hot tea) changed to 'coffee, coffee' and 'idlis, idlis' at the stations. In the early hours of the morning the train stopped at a station. Five o'clock. Good, I had another two hours before I would be reaching my destination. 'Where are we?' I asked idly, as a head appeared level with my bunk. 'Nellore', said the man as he walked down the carriage. I nearly fell off my berth, and got myself and my luggage on to the platform only a moment

before the train moved on. Fortunately friends at the Anandashram were aware of the changed train times, and Shri Narasimhulu was there to meet me. A bus and a jeep ride took us to the ashram in the Cuddapah District, a compound of simple whitewashed village-style buildings occupied by the workers and their families. There is a school and a hostel for boys from the Gramdan villages. A one-roomed guest house had recently been constructed to the pattern of the tanning sheds which the Khadi Commission was advocating.

Very soon I became conscious of an exceptional atmosphere, a sense of quiet purpose among the workers, and a determined effort on their part to make me understand the programme. We shared our thoughts on each issue without reservation in an honest search for a true evaluation. The success of the work in the Cuddapah district is no doubt due to the personality of Shri Veerabramham, a man of singular qualities.

He was born in 1919 at Chyyapadu, four miles from the Anandashram, a member of the Visubrahmana caste (carpenter and blacksmith), and attended the village school up to the 5th grade. He was not strong physically and rather than follow the customary occupation of his caste his mother sent him to a goldsmith. But his heart was not in this work. In 1932 he attended a nature-cure camp. The organiser felt himself attracted to the young man, and initiated him into some of the principles of nature cure and Gandhian thought. Veerabramham began to study Hindi and some English. He learned how to prepare village accounts and passed the examination for 'village officers' training. In the following year he became involved in the freedom movement and worked as a Congress volunteer. In 1941 he began to organise handicrafts and Khadi in his village. About 100 people supported him in his efforts. He offered to participate in the Satyagraha during the 1942 struggle, but was advised by the Congress leaders in his district to continue with village industries. He extended these to surrounding villages. During this period he came into contact with one big landlord who was seriously ill. Veerabramham attended him for six months. The landlord recovered and in gratitude offered him 40 acres of land as a gift in furtherance of his work.



An ashram was founded on this land in March 1942 under the guidance of Swami Sita Ram and other State Congress leaders. Veerabramham organised social projects in five neighbouring villages. Agriculture was started on the ashram land, and Khadi and village industries intensified. But the British Government strongly opposed such developments between 1943 and 1946. The cost of the ashram was met by the various activities. In 1946 the political situation eased and Congress leaders were released from prison. At their advice the ashram was made into a Public Trust. Veerabramham now visited Sevagram where he met Shri Prabhakar, a close associate of Gandhi's. Gandhi himself was not then at Sevagram. Prabhakar initiated him into the 'Gandhian' way of life. During the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the South Indian Hindi Propagation Society in Madras in the same year (1946), he met Gandhi and stayed with him for ten days. He presented Gandhi with samples of handicrafts, and Gandhi encouraged him to continue his constructive programme.

• In 1948 the ashram became the centre for the struggle for linguistic States and the formation of Andhra. State level leaders met and started their agitation from there. A weekly paper 'Gramseva' was published from the ashram.

When Vinoba came to Andhra in 1952 in connection with the Telengana incident, the ashram became the Bhoodan Headquarters. In pursuit of Bhoodan Veerabramham covered the whole of Andhra. He had his own van, bought with a loan from the ashram, and toured the country with other leaders following in Vinoba's footsteps. In 1957 Vinoba visited the ashram. Gramdan started. In 1958 the Nirman Samiti was formed and training of Gramdan workers began. Sixteen men were selected for village-level worker training in Bombay. When they returned, actual work started—then only in Khadi. This programme was followed by Karyakartas (literally meaning 'job-doer') training—eighty young men from Gramdan villages were selected for this and given two months' instruction in four consecutive batches. The workers then undertook surveys in the 550 Gramdan villages, and social work commenced in 1960. Village councils were formed, and the villagers were taught Gramdan ideologies. J.P. Narayan, Annasahib

Saraswabuddhe, Shankar Rao Deo (then secretary of the Sarva Seva Sangh) and others visited the area to give advice and study the potentialities for development. Co-operative societies were started in the villages and all land registered in the name of the society. Only after the well programme, financed by War-on-Want, increased the land value could loans for intensive development be taken up.

In Cuddapah therefore we have four quite distinctive phases :

1. Village industries—mainly spinning.
2. Formation of village councils and co-operative societies.
3. Teaching of Gramdan principles and change of social attitudes.
4. Economic development programme.

But behind all that is going on in the Cuddapah district stands the personality of Veerabramham. During the period when he had pursued a Gandhian constructive programme he happened to read a booklet by Shri Thallapradada Prakashyaydu, one of the old Gandhian workers in Andhra Pradesh, now 80 years of age. This booklet, written in Telegu, contained the message of Jesus Christ taken from the writings of Tolstoy. It gave him an 'insight' into the spirit of 'regeneration'. He felt that whatever money was spent on the development of the weaker section of society was useless without a fundamental change in the attitude of the people. He has not found in the writings of Gandhi any message which 'touched the heart of the lowest man in the same way', and he maintained that the writings of Vinoba may be stimulating to the intellectuals and other sections of society but only the message of Jesus went directly to the very core of man. He challenged Sanskrit scholars and Sarvodaya leaders to show him such passages in the Vedas and other Hindu literature or among the sayings of Vinoba and Gandhi. The rich too need a change of heart, he felt, but lack a new spiritual direction.

In 1963 Veerabramham formed the Anthyodaya Mandal with the sub title 'Unto this Last', an organisation of workers dedicated to the service of the backward, downtrodden and oppressed people, inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ and Ruskin, and at the same time carrying out the constructive programme outlined by Gandhi and Vinoba.

In a leaflet Veerabramham sets out some of his thinking which is guiding him and his workers in the execution of their duties.

"Asia", he writes, "is the land of the world's great religions. The Aryan rishis, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mahommed are all Asiatics. Jesus was essentially a 'Prince of Peace'. He sought to establish peace in a world of religious pride and sectarian strife through the gospel of dynamic love for God and man, and unselfish labour for the good of all. . . . 'We walk by faith, not by sight', says Keshab Chandra Sen, the great Brahma Bhakta. 'You may cut off my nose or pluck out my eyes—that will not harm me. But blast my faith in God, and I am dead', declares Mahatma Gandhi. They are true followers of Christ and the Christ spirit.

"The man who attempts to deprive you of your faith does an infinitely greater wrong than he who robs you of your purse or property. . . . faithlessness is in effect nothing short of a living death. . . . Prayer and service are one and indivisible, for the former is invariably a serious call to the latter. . . . Service means duty. . . . again duty means a life-long obligation, a holy burden and an inviolable responsibility. . . . Thus the life and death of Jesus are, to the Christian and non-Christian alike, a standing example of faith, prayer and service. . . . It follows, therefore, that it is up to everyone of us to imitate him, if only to fulfil in some measure the purpose for which we have been created as human beings. . . . May the holy fire of his message come to each one of us, Christian and non-Christian, in all its true significance to make us, each in his own place, a true friend and follower of Jesus."

From Shri Veerabramham's personality emanate strength and spiritual power, delightfully blended with gaiety and a profound sense of humour which is reflected in the happiness of his colleagues and workers. My visit became diffused with the same kind of purpose which these workers apply to all that they undertake. Constructive work in Cuddapah is a joyful adventure based on sound pragmatism.

At one point I asked whether the Gramdan Act was operating in Andhra. To my surprise Veerabramham replied: 'We don't worry about the Gramdan Act. Let the Government

legislate or not, it doesn't concern us'. 'Why not?' I wanted to know. He then explained that with the vesting of all Gramdan lands in the co-operative societies he had achieved the necessary documentation of title deeds for the purpose of their constructive work. If and when the Act came into force legalisation would become a simple matter.

The district of Cuddapah consists of nine Revenue Taluks (sub-divisions), divided into 984 Revenue villages, and was one of the four districts ceded to the British Government by the Nizam of Hyderabad. At one time it formed part of Krishnadevaraya's Empire and has an ancient cultural heritage and historic background. On the whole people are responsive to new ideas. They live mainly on agriculture and trade. Their subsidiary occupations have always been spinning, weaving, dairying, mat-making, tailoring, carpentry, bell-metal making, hand-pounding of rice, etc. The Muslim population is an important minority in the district, which for a number of years was under Muslim rule. But there are also many Christian or mixed Hindu-Christian villages.

The district of Cuddapah lies in the southern part of the central Deccan plateau, has scanty rainfall, and the hazards of monsoon failure are always present, as in 1935, '39, '42 and '51, when large tracts of land remained uncultivated, resulting in severe famines. The small streams rise during the rainy season, overflow their banks, and cause wide-spread soil erosion. The main food crops are paddy, cholem, kambu and ragi; commercial crops grown are groundnuts, turmeric, tobacco, castor oil and sugar cane. The district has latterly become famous for orange and lemon cultivation, and for grapes and mangoes. The sweet and juicy Karbuja melon is grown in river-beds.

About one-eight of the area is covered by forests. Whatever the potential resources may be, one's first visual impact of the landscape is of its cruelty. The hot dry earth is cracked, covered in shrub and jungle-like stunted forests. The hills, last out-reaches of the Deccan plateau, sprawl into the country like hundreds of splayed elephants' feet. The plains are littered with stones of every size, and large and small rocks jut out of the soil. People live and work in torrid heat under a merciless sun. Seventy-five per cent of them have little land or no land at all,

and the land that there is, is barren, and the people have no implements to dig even a spit to plant a flower. For centuries they have been deprived, made outcasts by the events of history. But where money and skill has been at work over the decades the fields stand high with tight crops, trees are weighed down with fruit, and villages and bazaars look prosperous.

Most of the Gramdan villages where constructive work has been taken up lie in the interior, and many are inaccessible except on foot, even a jeep being unable to penetrate. They are Harijan and Christian villages, composed of the backward, the down-trodden and exploited members of society. Human vices of every kind were rampant among them. These had to be eradicated and replaced by a new way of life. All aspects of this 'new way of life' were incorporated in a pledge which the whole village had to take before actively participating in any development programme. Veerabramham feels strongly about what he calls the moral programme, for he believes that without this mere economic advancement would only lead to increased pleasure-seeking and further degeneration of the people.

The karyakartas, the job-doers, proved invaluable in creating the necessary change of heart and habits. When they returned from their two months' training period at the Anandashram they were equipped with questionnaires which required daily visiting of all the families in their village. 'Have you taken your daily bath?' 'Have you washed your clothes today?' 'Have you done this and this and this?' 'Have you abstained from that and that and that?' As only small hamlets were involved such procedure was entirely feasible, and the files of these questionnaires which I saw showed that this scheme was carried out successfully.

Podili Papayia is the chairman of the village council and the Co-operative Society of New Ambavaram. 'We too belonged to old Ambavaram one and a half miles away on the other side of the hill', he told us. 'We used to get up in the morning, go to the jungle, collect wood and other things, return to the village just before sunset, wash our teeth and eat the food we had prepared the night before. Then we went to other villages and sold what we had collected. We also took black Babul bark and made toddy and got drunk. We lived in dire poverty

without enough food or clothing. We ate the rotten decaying meat of dead animals. We drank dirty water from puddles in the village, for we had no well. We knew no better. Then the Gramdan workers came. They told us: You must change your bad habits and take a pledge for a new life, then we can give you a little aid. They taught us to take daily baths, and wash and change our clothes. And our health improved. But old habits are slow to die and only ten families would join me. So we separated ourselves and built new huts. We have dug three wells and have one oil pump for irrigation. We have sown forty acres of land this year, reclaimed since we were given agricultural implements and pairs of bullocks and water buffaloes, paid for with funds from War-on-Want. What we have harvested now will last us for four months. We will distribute the grain after threshing. We hire out our six pairs of bullocks at eight to ten rupees per day. We have enough work and some food all the year round. For the future we need to concentrate on nourishing the soil.' The women said: 'We only want more work'. Theirs is a hard life and a frugal one but blissful heaven compared with what it was before.

When in 1964 the ten families first separated from the main village they moved to a piece of eight acres of barren land and built new houses neatly arranged in rows on either side of a tree-lined avenue. The houses have white-washed mud-walls and thatched roofs, and are similar to our modern camping tents in construction, wooden posts replacing tubular aluminium poles.

So now the people had new houses and eight acres of barren land. At this juncture aid from War-on-Want provided the means for digging a well, the purchase of buffaloes, bulls and agricultural implements. The people levelled their land and started cultivation. A nearby mission helped to purchase a further 22 acres of adjacent land, and they further reclaimed another plot of 14 acres of government waste land. As a next step they formed a Co-operative Society and vested all this land in the society. Thus they became eligible for a loan of Rs. 12,000 from government sources. They purchased an oil engine and pump set for their irrigation well. A second and third well are nearly completed, and a drinking water well has

been constructed near the new village. They have planted an orchard and are adopting new methods and techniques of cultivation. All land is communally farmed, all produce and income equally shared by the villagers. Until the time of distribution the grain is stored on an elevated platform and covered with straw. 'How will you keep rats away?' I asked. 'Our children watch over the grain to keep it safe', Podili Papayia replied. Let us hope that before long his people will build a rat-proof and damp-proof grain store, to avoid losses they can barely afford.

A tanning shed has been built with the help of the Khadi Commission, and the women spin in their spare time on the traditional wheel. Hardly any of the adults are literate, and only half of the school-age children attend classes in a nearby village.

The people of Ambavaram looked incredibly happy. Thirty years ago they had become Roman Catholics because the priests had told them that as Christians they would no longer be outcasts. May be this was a contributing factor but the real change, the sense of self-reliance and self-respect, came with the implementation of Gramdan.

As we drove to Old Ambavaram the sun was rapidly disappearing behind the hill which separated it from New Ambavaram. The villagers were coming home from the fields walking wearily along the edges of the dust track. Were they just tired or were they looking sulkily at us? It was probably a bit of both, for no one ever visited them. All interest was focused on New Ambavaram; after all, what was there to be seen in their village?

But when we stopped the jeep and walked to an open space the villagers soon assembled and were only too willing to talk. 'We didn't think about the future when Podili Papayia urged us to change our way of life and to make a fresh start,' they told us. 'It was much easier just to carry on. But for the last four years we have watched New Ambavaram develop, have seen new beginnings and progress, have seen the difference in the people. Today we recognise our mistake, we have changed our mental outlook and our attitude and we are trying to copy New Ambavaram. But what can we do without help? The

Block Development Officer lives ten miles away. He never comes to this village, and we have no contact with him'.

The women were joining the men and took part in the discussion. But it was rapidly getting dark and we had to leave after a short time. Men and women crowded around us speeding us on our way with happy smiles. They had been visited. The workers knew of their change of heart. They would not remain forgotten. Advice and help would come to them. And it did. Four months later news reached me that constructive work had begun.

We drove along the same road on another day, but this time we left the village on our left and proceeded another furlong or so to 'Muslim' Ambavaram. Actually there are as many Hindu families living there as there are Muslims, 60 of each. As we talked to the people who were crowding around us the Muslim headman and the Hindu headman sat side by side in the same way as they do in village meetings. They know that under Gramdan people live and work unitedly. They have watched progress in other villages under Gramdan, so now they too wanted to sign the declaration. They were ready.

The young and the old were eager to know what they should do, how to proceed, how to ensure that everyone in the village would join this new way of living and working together. Yes, they assured us, they would co-operate. When would the workers come back, when could they form a village council as a first step?

Mallepalli is a Gramdan village on the main road and therefore conveniently placed for the Khadi Production Centre which has been operating for ten to twelve years. There have always been traditional spinners at Mallepalli and in many of the surrounding villages, so that 1500 spinners spread over 17 villages are attached to this centre. The centre is organised by the Cuddapah District Nirman Samiti and serves Gramdanis and non-Gramdanis alike.

Since the introduction of the scheme whereby spinners can exchange their yarn for cloth, a family of five saves roughly Rs. 500 a year. Men and women told us that, for those who spin, Khadi was all right. Non-spinners, although they would like to wear Khadi, could not afford to buy it. Even here at the Khadi



Production Centre, the price was too high and more expensive than mill cloth.

We moved on to Chinnaypalli, now renamed Shantinagar, a small hamlet of 18 Protestant families belonging to the Church of India, Pakistan and Ceylon. They have been Christians for the last 100 years. Eight families were traditional weavers. Today each family in the village owns a loom, and weaves for the Khadi Production Centre.

The villagers acquired 25 acres of Government waste land and are growing pulses on this. They have started rebuilding their houses near the newly acquired land. Before Gramdan they had only enough work for four months in the year. Today, thanks to the Khadi Production Centre everybody is gainfully employed. Annual incomes have risen from Rs. 250 in 1963 to Rs. 400 in 1967. There are three teachers and one mechanic among the villagers working outside the hamlet. At least one member in each family is literate, some are women, and ten children go to the village school.

• We were sitting outside the simple construction which was to be the church and community centre. Men, women and children were neatly turned out with clean clothes and well-groomed hair. The pastor had joined us. He was a kindly man, a friend both of the villagers and the workers.

I had learned at the Khadi Production Centre that each spinner produces enough yarn to receive on an average 60 metres of cloth per annum. The record amount of yarn was spun by Shri Konda Reddy of Kesapuram, a non-Gramdan village of 100 families. The people soon followed us as we wandered through the lanes of Kesapuram. Women were spinning on the traditional wheel in practically every house. There are 250 spinners in this village. Some of the houses were pukka and quite prosperous-looking with beautifully carved and metal-studded doorways. We gathered on the verandah of a house near the road-side and talked about Gramdan. The men knew all about it but needed more time to weigh up all the consequences. They hoped to join before long but not everybody was ready to sign the declaration just yet.

On the way to Papireddipalli we stopped to look at the newly constructed well, irrigating 320 orange trees. This well like all

the others I saw was most picturesque. Its supporting walls are lined with local stone, and steps lead down and below the water level. The wells are large, usually 36' x 54', so that at first I called them tanks but was soon corrected. Papireddipalli is only a small hamlet of 12 families who were converted to Catholicism 36 years ago. They declared Gramdan in 1959. Before then they had led 'dirty, unhealthy lives'. Cholera and small-pox prevailed. Their only drinking water had been the murky, stagnant liquid which they collected in small pits. A drinking water well was their first priority, and they showed it to me proudly. Their 28 acres of land had been lying fallow, for they had no implements with which to cultivate them. They sought work outside the village and their lives were spent in constant comings and goings, never able to settle down for long before need drove them away again.

In 1964/65 they dug their first well with aid from War-on-Want. They purchased a pair of bullocks, a cart and agricultural implements. Next they formed a co-operative society and raised a loan of Rs. 6000. They bought another two pairs of bullocks and one more cart, reclaimed two acres of land (Rs. 800 paid for their food while working), and bought an oil pump. Immediately after completion of the first well they started on a second one but ran out of funds. Fortunately the R.C. mission came to their rescue, giving them grain and money. When the well is finished it will irrigate another nine acres. The men propose to grow sugar cane as a cash crop. There is a good demand for this from two sugar factories in the vicinity.

In pre-Gramdan days soaking and tanning of skins were done inside their houses, a most unhealthy procedure. With help from the Khadi Commission the men have built a flaying and tanning shed, and deal with about 100 to 150 skins a year. Every house plies a traditional spinning wheel. Six spindle wheels were tried but were not successful.

Adjacent to their houses are four small cottages lived in by weavers. These Hindu families settled there some time ago. There is no contact or communication between the two groups. 'If they want to join us', the gramdams declared, 'they are welcome', but there has never been any deliberate effort by either side. They simply never belonged to the village, so why

worry. They live peacefully enough as they are.

Among the villagers are three men and one woman teacher working in nearby schools, and the 'job-doers' conduct adult education classes. The Catholic father had come to meet us in the village. He has only been in the district for the last 6 months. There had been trouble with the previous priest which has had some unpleasant repercussions. Perhaps lack of spiritual guidance accounted for the lack of neatness among the children and women. As for the Father himself, he was one of those jovial, rotund and intelligent types one so often finds among Catholic priests.

We reached Thotlapalli on a Sunday afternoon. The villagers recieved us and garlanded us with skins of spun yarn in Gramdan tradition. They led us along the main village street to their pleasant little church at the other end. We entered and the people sang a hymn set to Indian style music. One of the men then read a piece from Colossians in the Telegu translation of the Bible.

As we left the church I noticed a young man in trousers and white shirt. He came forward and addressed me in fluent English. 'I am a B.A.', he whined, 'I studied in Hyderabad. Now I am back, for I have no job. What am I to do?' 'Surely you can help your father who is lame, he will need you,' I said. 'How can I work with my hands since I have studied, since I am a B.A.?' came the all too familiar reply. What a tragic situation, and what a common one! The Catholic fathers have not helped him by sending him for higher education without making sure of a job for him, but have produced another disillusioned young man who is already a misfit in his own society. How different were the two young men who took us to the well site. They were full of life and energy and plans for the future. No dull and workless moments for them. The well we saw has a particularly good underground spring and an ample water supply, and irrigates eight acres and an orchard of 320 orange trees. Here, too, a 5 h.p. pump has been purchased with a loan taken up by the co-operative society. A cabin for the engine is still to be constructed. One of our two young men was injured during rock blasting inside the well and bed-ridden for six months. The villagers took this as a bad omen and

stopped work. After much thought and lengthy discussions they took fresh courage and completed the well. 'Look at me', challenged the young man, and beat his chest 'I was afraid, yes, when it happened. But today! Do I look like a bad omen?' he asked. 'I am alive'.

I found so much of this resurgent, almost jubilant spirit among the young men and women, a quiet happiness among their elders, and I realised as never before the changes which Gramdan was bringing to these communities.

Just before the two young men were taking us along to the well the women crowded around us and entreated us to see to it that they were given an allocation of cotton. They had none left to spin and they needed clothes badly. They thought only of work and more work.

The 65 R.C. families of Mundumala declared Gramdan in 1956. We did not go into the village but stopped by the site, where men and women were excavating a new well. They worked with the determination of a regiment of ants, swarming in and out of the excavation. 'Why did you wait so long before beginning constructive work?' I asked the young men; 'twelve years is a long time'. 'When the village declared Gramdan we were children', they replied. 'We had to bide our time, we had to wait until we were old enough to oppose our elders who did not want change and new methods. But today we are no longer afraid and we can act independently.' The young men were bursting with energy in spite of the heat which had left me limp long ago. Their bare upper bodies were mud and lime spattered, their hair dull, dusty and tangled, but their faces were vividly alive.

This well was financed by the R.C. mission under a food-for-work scheme. Previously the mission had doled out grain or money merely as a relief measure (in return for prayer as some people put it). But when the ashram workers approached them they readily agreed to the present method. A second well will be constructed with aid from War-on-Want. Once the wells are dug and the land value has increased from about Rs. 100 per acre to Rs. 1000 or more, a co-operative society will be formed, all village land vested in this and a loan taken up against the new land valuation. This loan will help further

constructive work.

I was learning a lot about wells on this tour. The well at Chowdaravaripalli is as exciting to look at as it is different from any of the other wells I had seen. Set back from the river bed its supporting walls reach up a high bank. On the other side, which is almost level with newly reclaimed fields, only the rim and oil engine, the pipe, the channel and the gushing water are visible.

The hamlet of 22 R.C. families is some distance from the main Hindu village. Their fore-fathers were converted to Christianity by S.P.G. missionaries so long ago that they cannot remember when it happened. Then some fifteen years ago they came under the influence of a Danish Catholic father and they changed their denomination. I thought it unwise to probe too deeply into their motivation. Today everybody in the village is literate and all the children go to school.

Before the declaration of Gramdan in 1956 the villagers depended entirely on the main village of 150 families. They declared Gramdan in the hope of gaining some measure of self-reliance and independence. I asked them how they hoped to achieve this. So they told me. First they had constructed the well I had been shown on the way. It had been their own idea. They knew of old that there were springs beneath the sands of the river-bed and they also knew how to dig such a well, for the knowledge had been handed down to them by their ancestors. They discussed the project with Shri Veerabramham and his colleagues who offered assistance from War-on-Want funds against free labour. The villagers accepted gladly and completed the digging in three months. Within another three months all the work was finished and the pump installed. Some eight acres were reclaimed and are now under irrigation. They have another two acres of dry land near their houses, and hope to construct another well to irrigate these, for at the moment they are dependent for water for this piece of land on the whims of the Hindus in the main village, and water is not always forthcoming.

But relations with the Hindu village are good. The Gramdanis give their labour, partially to repay old debts, partially for extra earnings. But their own fields are beginning to demand

more of their time, and available labour for outside work is lessening proportionately. This creates tension at times. On the other hand men and women from both communities work side by side in the fields, and the Hindu labourers ask about joining Gramdan. 'You are free to do so', reply the Gramdanis, but no determined move has yet been made, only a peaceful exchange of ideas which is a good beginning. Whenever there are any visible new developments discussion ensues.

On Sunday evenings, sometimes more often, the women gather to talk about women's work, about their problems and their families.

There are 22 spinners in the Gramdan hamlet, 80 in the Hindu village. Most of the spinners exchange yarn for cloth. A leather industry has been started producing shoes and baling buckets which are sold in seven or eight nearby villages. Since the erection of the tanning shed with help from the Khadi Commission, their work has increased. Even so, on five or six days each month, during May to September, people go hungry for they have no stores left and no money to buy any food. Before Gramdan there had been ten hungry days. Soon though they will have enough food for every day in each month and a surplus in the future, for the Gramdanis have applied for 45 acres of government waste land near their well.

About twenty families in the Hindu village are as badly as, or even worse off than, the Gramdanis. Money-lenders help out with loans at exorbitant interest rates, and rioting and disturbances take place frequently.

We moved on to another village, and were meeting in a ten-year-old R.C. church, a mere village hut. Inside were an altar, the cross above it and an incense lamp swinging from a beam. Ten years ago ten families of weavers were settled here on 40 acres of Bhoodan land. They had come from four villages within a radius of ten to thirty miles. They built a common weaving shed and living huts, and named their new village Sarvodayapuram. Then they began reclaiming the land. Twenty acres are now under cultivation. They built a well but found the water level to be too shallow for irrigation and it is being used for domestic purposes. Another well will be built this March (1968) at the river bed, and faced with stones from the nearby

hills. The Khadi Commission gave Rs. 3000 for the building of the weaving shed, Rs. 2000 for the erection of the ten huts, and ten sets of weaving implements. The village Council formed a co-operative society with Rs. 100 for share capital loaned by the Anandashram. Aid from War-on-Want helped to purchase two pairs of he-buffaloes and three sets of agricultural implements, and will finance the construction of the new well. The families came from non-Gramdan villages but had some ideas what it was all about. Since coming here they have been able to combine agriculture with their traditional craft. They have worked hard and made a good beginning. The ten families comprise 85 people, 30 men, 30 women and twenty odd children. Ten men and women are literate. There is no school but the workers in the area teach the children of school age, eight boys and four girls.

In their old villages they too had known many hungry days. Today they have enough for their basic daily needs. The women find it difficult to think of anything beyond food but have a vague idea of leading a richer life one day, such as 'prayers' and marrying their children! They have no debts. It will take about four more years to reclaim all the land and grow enough food to eat really well. They will grow cotton; a tenth of an acre is sufficient to clothe one man for one year. The men want to build pukka houses, increase their live-stock with better animals, and lead a prayerful life.

These people had done well, they were planning their future and knew exactly where they wanted to go. They were quietly determined and at peace. I wanted to know if they realised how much of their achievements were due to their own attitude and outlook. I think I put my question rather badly, for they replied: 'It is the Gramdan workers who have helped us. It is they who have assisted us to organise our activities. When we have enough for ourselves, then we must go out to those who have less than we have and take to them the message of Gramdan'. When I told the villagers how much was due to their own efforts, they replied: 'There are two factors. First there were those who initiated us, and secondly, by working together we achieved great things.' I have been shown settlements of Bhodan land before, but never have I come across a group

of people so well imbued with the right kind of spirit. Here was no standing still, no thought of: You have given this much, now you must give us more. It was a gratifying experience.

Kattakindipalli or Giripuram, as it is now called, is a charming village built on a hill, its little Roman Catholic church crowning the very top. The 29 families declared Gramdan more than ten years ago. Since then they have built a well, they have bullocks and agricultural implements, carts and she-buffaloes. They said: 'We make proper use of these things which have come to us, because we use them collectively and share equally the good things and the bad things, our pleasures and our sorrows. They have 30 acres of land, all of it under cultivation. They earn more money with spinning and the leather industry since Gramdan, but are no better off because of the rise in costs. Their population too has increased by a third during the last thirty years.

I noticed a young man dressed in trousers and shirt among the people surrounding us. He too had been sent to school and university by the Catholic fathers. But before he could take his finals he developed an incurable ear condition and is gradually going deaf. He has no hope of employment outside the village, and is not fit physically for village work. We discussed his case and learnt that the workers, in consultation with the fathers, hoped to train him for some occupation which will make him independent and give him the chance of leading a useful life in spite of his handicap. They have in fact since done so, and he is already working at the Anandashram.

The 29 families of Muddamvaripalli are a sad little community even today, although conditions have improved since Gramdan. Their poverty has been such that any change for the better is still barely noticeable. Eighteen acres are under cultivation, two acres of government wasteland have been reclaimed. They have dug a well, and have purchased four pairs of bullocks, two carts and some agricultural implements. They hope to reclaim and cultivate further acres of land. So they have more food now but never quite enough for their needs. Four men are literate, and one of the young women. Up to six months ago the village school was functioning in a dilapidated building. Since then the teacher has come to the village daily but holds no



classes. He simply marks the register and disappears again. The villagers lodged a complaint, and decided at the same time that the one literate young woman should teach the children from now on until the school is running properly again.

I saw many children and particularly small babies suffering from severe mal-nutrition. The women too looked badly underfed, and I noticed that in this village there were no chickens scratching in the dust and cackling and fluttering out of the way of our jeep. The protein deficiency through lack of eggs showed markedly between these villagers and others raising poultry, however few and small the eggs may be. Milk is also not available.

This small hamlet too is part of a larger Hindu village. Relationships are amicable and the people of both communities work happily side by side in the fields. But there has not yet been sufficient improvement under Gramdan to stimulate any discussion.

We moved on to Singarayapalli, a larger village of 43 families who became Roman Catholics 24 years ago. We met in the church. The altar has the traditional picture on the upper part, such as one may see in any Catholic village church all over the world. But the lower half was different. The bunches of grapes representing the lifeblood of Jesus, and a ram to remind people of Jesus the shepherd, could have depicted a scene from any of the Hindu scriptures. Even the futuristically designed cross between the bunches of grapes did not destroy this illusion.

I asked what change had come to them since they had embraced the Christian faith, and was told that they had given up worshipping idols and trees and the eating of dead animals. After the declaration of Gramdan they also gave up the habit of drink. Development under Gramdan has been on the same lines as elsewhere. There is hardly any land available, only 16 acres belong to the village, but the Gramdanis have applied for 500 acres of government wasteland two miles distant from the village. Meanwhile they work as agricultural labourers. Both men and women can think of nothing else except 'more work'. Leisure time has no meaning for them. Some 25 men and 16 women are literate and 40 children, 15 girls, go to a

Protestant school in the next village a furlong away. I asked the little girls: who taught you to do your hair so nicely and keep your clothes clean? To which they replied, the teacher in school. I found this intriguing, because every time that I encountered children and women who were particularly neatly turned out it has been the influence of the Protestant teachers or pastors. I began to wonder if it was due to the fact that, unlike the Catholics, they were married. I had not been looking for any such comparison. The fact became more obvious as we proceeded from village to village, and my companions began to remark on this. We never knew to what denomination a village belonged until we started our discussions, and therefore had no preconceived ideas on the matter.

The 200 chickens and their eggs no doubt also contributed to the better appearance of the children. Their faces were lively and alert, the women too looked healthier than in Muddamvaripalli.

Lakshmipallim and Timaraspalli, with 15 and 67 families respectively, are situated on either side of the main road at a distance of about two miles each way. Both villages will be rebuilding their houses near the road, and their new wells are being dug on reclaimed government wasteland. The exceptional feature about the latter village is that a woman has been appointed President of the Village-Council. I met her by the well site, an intelligent person about 30 years of age, who showed determination and the will to lead her village and who obviously commanded the respect of her people.

The 65 families of Govapuram are of mixed Protestant and Hindu faiths. They were all converted to Christianity about 30 years ago by the London Mission. One Father Rampus started a school and instilled in the people 'the faith in God by persuasion'. But some twenty families with relatives in different Hindu villages reverted back to Hinduism, for relationships had become too complicated for them. During the last ten years pressure had been brought to bear on the villagers to draw them into the Catholic Church in response to grain distribution by the R.C. Mission. When the people 'stood steadfast by their declared faith' grain distribution ceased. Today neither Protestant pastor nor Catholic priest come to the village. Shri

David, the school teacher and a son of this village, conducts prayer meetings, not only on Sundays, but on every day of the week. Both Hindus and Christians join him and both communities attend each other's religious festivals and help in their preparation.

David, now 48 years of age, went to an American Baptist Mission school at Nellore and was trained as a teacher by the London Mission Society at Cuddapah. His first postings were to schools in that area. In 1943 he was sent back to his own village. Recently the Panchayat Samiti took over the school management from the Mission Society. Thus he has become a government employee. Under the mission he was paid Rs. 2.50 per child at school per month. The government pays Rs. 126 a month but gives no child allowance. Since the recently revised pay scales came into force his earnings are much the same as before. He explained to us that, while their faith inspired them on the spiritual level, Gramdan brought changes on the social plane.

The people had small land-holdings which none of them could cultivate satisfactorily. In 1956 they decided to pool their land and work it together. Actual work on this basis started in 1960 when they formed the village council, constructed one well and began spinning. A co-operative society was registered in 1963. Aid from War-on-Want helped to build another well, purchased one pair of bullocks, three pairs of he-buffaloes and a cart. The emphasis has been placed on agricultural development and planting of orchards, so no milch cattle was purchased then. But there are 50 she-buffaloes in the village, individually owned. As a sign of gratitude the men had branded their draft animals F.H.C. (Freedom from Hunger Campaign), but when this caused a slight infection they stopped.

Out of an allocation of 100 acres of Government wasteland 70 acres are under cultivation, 26 acres with irrigation, 13 to each well. The Khadi Commission helped with the development of the leather industry. I visited the well-built tanning shed. Twenty skins are dealt with per month, which is more than is needed for the local market. Any surplus of shoes and baling buckets, manufactured in the village, is sent to Madras.

Ten years ago the villagers had to seek employment outside

the village for at least 15 days in every month, and never ate more than one meal during this period. Today they claim to be 75% better off with only a few days when there is not enough for two meals. They still do some share-cropping but at least they now have work all the year round. Individual old debts have not yet been cleared, but at least nobody has taken up new ones, and they are trying hard to pay back the existing loans. Some 100 men and 30 women are literate, and 57 children go to school.

Plans for the future include further agricultural development and handicrafts for the women, such as weaving of tape, lace and mats, knitting and tailoring. The young men too are anxious to learn leather crafts apart from making shoes and baling buckets. The villagers are in the habit of borrowing books from a neighbouring village library. They read old epics, novels and children's stories. In the village there is a selection of Sarvodaya literature which they study. They also receive regularly periodicals and a daily newspaper. Some thirteen young men belong to the Shanti Sena.

Pakkirupalli has a population of 165 people. They were converted to Protestantism by the London Mission Society more than sixty years ago. Their church is at Cuddapah three miles away, so they built their own little chapel in the village which they mostly attend.

I asked them why they had changed their religion. They replied that their parents had told them that as Christians, after this life, they would reach God. In contrast to Hinduism Jesus was born for sinners—as assured in the Bible—and only through him can they be united with God. Why did they declare Gramdan in 1957, I asked next. They wanted to live as one family, they said. From 1958 until 1963 they earned a little extra with spinning. But in 1963 they registered their ten acres of fallow land in the Co-operative Society. They were supplied with two pairs of bullocks and began cultivating five acres near their village. They completed a well in 1965. Due to a very shallow water level it dries out quickly and will only irrigate three acres. They need a drilling rig to deepen the well to about 50 or 60 feet when they will be able to irrigate ten acres with their 6 h.p. pump.

Four years ago the village council bought ten acres, of barren land for Rs. 500. Today a railway contractor offered them Rs. 30,000 for the same plot. And no wonder! The people of Pakkirupalli have created an oasis in a desert. Bananas, tomatoes, pulses, castor-oil trees, groundnuts, bajra, dhan and other crops are growing in healthy abundance. The fields are a magnificent sight, and so are the baskets of harvested vegetables. A further 70 acres of wasteland have been applied for.

The people are intelligent, look clean and healthy with well-groomed hair and clean clothes. All are literate. The children attend the village school. They study their Bible and read story-books, and a newspaper reaches the village daily.

In the nearby hills tribals (Yanadis) were roaming the forests. They watched the people of Pakkirupalli, and saw how they created wealth out of barren soil. They came and talked to the village council. Last year eleven tribal families joined in Gramdan and were admitted to the co-operative society. Their spokesman explained to us how they had lived like animals for generations. They too wanted a better life and to settle on land, give up bad habits, and no longer wear torn and dirty clothes. 'We were in rags', he said. 'Our hair was unkempt and our children had no chance. Now we and our children are living side by side with the villagers. Soon, we will be like them.'

It would be tedious and repetitive to tell the story of every village I visited, though the temptation to relate in detail the incredible transformation in these villages is very great.

In contrast to the work carried out under Gramdan the Father Wander Walk project near Veeraballi shows an entirely different approach. It too seeks the uplift of the weaker section of society. The present scheme employs 90 families as farm labourers on 350 acres of reclaimed land. Further reclamation goes on simultaneously with cultivation. The labourers are member of a collective farming co-operative society which manages the farm, and earn a regular wage. Any income over and above the payment of wages is ploughed back into the society and used towards the erection of further buildings and equipment. A fairly elaborate housing colony is coming up. Due to Father Wander Walk's long association with the R.C. mission work in the district, the project has the flavour of a

patriarchal society. Although Father Wander Walk is aware of this and trying to minimise his influence, yet while he is there people will always await his move and respond to his leadership rather than take the initiative into their own hands.

All the members of the society belong to the backward classes. They have openly stated that they would refuse membership to any family belonging to the upper castes. 'We will have no Reddy come into the society and domineer us', they say. This more than anything else shows their lack of self-confidence. Fundamentally they have remained what they were, labourers earning a wage who are still afraid of exploitation. I doubt if the people in the many Gramdan villages whom I visited would have had this fear. 'Let a Reddy join us if he wants to do so', they would have said. 'We are independent now and strong. What harm could a Reddy do to us?' This would have been their attitude.

The farm of Father Wander Walk is to become the nucleus of a 10,000 acre development scheme employing modern methods and scientific techniques. The project has been discussed with leading workers from the Anandashram and Shri Radhakrishna of the Sarva Seva Sangh during his recent visit. It is to be hoped that the Gramdan workers and Gramdanis will be closely linked with such a development scheme for each group can learn much from the other.

I also visited the Regional Fruit Research station at Kodur, the experimental plantations, the various laboratories, and the jam and fruit juice factory. I was impressed by what I saw, by the scientists who showed me round, and last not least by the director's suggestion to set up small production units in the Gramdan villages rather than have their produce delivered to his plant. If this came about it would fit well into the Gandhian industrial pattern. In the next few years the plantations in the Gramdan villages will yield good crops of fruit, the fields good quality vegetables for canning, and small-scale canning units will give employment locally and prevent waste and deterioration of produce on long journeys, quite apart from the fact that they will further the policy of decentralisation.

Having been told by Shri Menase at Ratnagiri that flying centres were only lucrative in urban areas, I was surprised to

see so much of this industry at Cuddapah. Whereas there it had been a half-hearted affair here it was being expanded and developed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. It was found that 90% of the population conversant with the leather industry lived in Gramdan villages. A survey was undertaken to estimate the potentials for improving present techniques with the object of increasing earnings and employment.

There was at the moment no uniform method of collecting bones in the villages or a fixed price for a given quantity. The mode of getting the carcasses too differed from place to place. In some cases cattle owners exchanged the carcass for footwear and baling buckets with the leather workers, the caste known as chamars. In others the carcass was being purchased outright for the value of the skin which varied according to size from Rs. 8 to Rs. 30. Flaying used to be done in odd places but is already being concentrated on specially erected platforms. Tanning was done crudely in pits in earthen conical tubs with antiquated tools. Tanning materials were mostly those available from barks of trees collected deep in the jungle and not paid for. For want of technical knowledge other available materials were not used. There are no marketing difficulties locally where the demand is high, particularly for baling buckets used for irrigation. Any surplus in tanned hides is sold to Madras.

In the ten villages surveyed, on an average 580 carcasses are available annually, and there are 115 tanners and flayers to deal with them. With organised collection of skins and modern techniques the leather industry should make a decisive difference to the village economy. Better skins are already being produced, and with further training all sorts of leather goods will be made in the future.

I can't say that I enjoyed inspecting flaying centres and tanning sheds. But how could I refuse? The villagers were so proud in showing me the newly erected buildings and demonstrating and explaining the new methods. And no wonder! The tanning sheds stood square and solid usually at the edge of the village. Walls inside and out were white-washed under a corrugated metal roof. Inside hides were soaking in concrete tanks in various stages of the tanning process. Others were piled in a separate store room ready for disposal.

The young man in charge of the programme showed me samples of all kinds of leather which he was anxious to produce one day. He was impatient that for the time being so much of his skill and knowledge remained untapped. For it is 'no use pretending that a really good leather industry can be established overnight and he had already come a long way in a short time. One only needed to see the filthy tanning pits inside people's huts and know the acrid stench which hangs around the walls even today when they are no longer in use, to realise the difference the tanning sheds alone must make to people's health and living conditions.

It may be argued that only the weaker section of society is benefiting under Gramdan in the Cuddapah district, that the communities are small, rarely comprising the whole of a revenue village, and that many are single caste villages. This may be so. But the change among the people who have declared Gramdan, however small their hamlets, will and must gradually affect the larger villages and other sections of society. As the Gramdanis prosper the gap between them and their former employers begins to close. The landlords are dependent on labour, but their labour force is gradually finding less time to give to outside work. Some compromise will have to be reached. The landlords can no longer demand labour or dominate their former labourers. Eventually they will have to join Gramdan to ensure their own livelihood. This trend can already be felt in a few villages. It can only be a matter of time. The Gramdanis' willingness to remain on good terms with their employers, their former exploiters, should in the long run pave the way for Gramdan to spread to the bigger villages.

Constructive work is going on in 105 villages, a start is to be made in 70 more this year, and programmes are being planned for developing 3000 villages within the near future.

If I have any criticism, it is the complete absence of women's programmes in many of the Gramdan villages. Fortunately Veerabramham and his colleagues are fully aware of this short-coming, and a further training programme, this time for both male and female 'karyakartas', the job-doers, is being planned.





GRAMDAN<sup>3</sup> WHAT IS IT<sup>3</sup>



IT MEANS SCHOOL TOO



GRAMDAN OP' NO GRAMDAN, THERE IS ALWAYS THE BAZAR



DOES RAMDAN MEAN ME TOO

Nowhere else have I seen and understood Gramdan as clearly as in the Cuddapah district. If ever I had doubts regarding the need for social change prior to economic change, I have doubts no longer. People's attitudes must be changed and the people themselves prepared if a development programme is to succeed, even at a slow-down of economic progress and at some cost in material gain. I know this is a debatable point. In less backward areas the two processes can obviously go hand in hand. Even in this district, where untouched villages have watched development in neighbouring ones, certain attitude changes have already taken place so that, no doubt, with the spread of social education the preparatory period will gradually lessen and a stage be reached when the two processes will merge.

On my few hours' train journey to Madras I became aware how deeply I felt myself involved in the future happenings at Cuddapah.

I was told at the Sarva Seva Sangh in Varanasi: If you want to see Gramdan functioning properly, go to Batlagundu in Tamilnad. But before reaching Batlagundu I was to visit Tinneveli where District Dan had been declared at Christmas. Through some lack of communication I was under the impression that the purpose of my journey was merely to attend the function of celebrating 'District Dan' on 12th February. (A declaration of District Dan requires that 75% of the villages in the District are prepared to participate, as Block Dan requires participation of 75% of the villages comprising one block). I had no intimation that any other programme had been arranged for me. So, thinking that I had a day in hand, I broke my journey from Madras at Madurai to see the Gandhi Museum and the famous Meenakshi temple. This was obviously a mistake as it upset arrangements of which I knew nothing beforehand. I also did not know that Mr. Meyer of the 'Meyer's Needy Fund', a one-man West German charity, had been touring the area for the last ten days. All the chief workers were with him. My own visit following immediately and overlapping by a day or two must have been most inconvenient. Also, I cannot help feeling that visits by so many foreigners must have an adverse effect on the villagers, quite apart from the fact that they interrupt the work, and place an extra burden on the workers and on finances. For the sake of obtaining funds such tours by foreigners are an essential by-product of the whole concept of aided programmes. But are they justified in view of their detrimental effect on the village psychology? Yet how can donors be satisfied that funds have been utilized for the purpose for which they have been raised? How can new

funds be obtained unless needs are illustrated and discussed on the spot?

Technical assistance programmes on the whole are not so much concerned with social change as with economic development. Sarvodaya with its all-embracing philosophy is concerned with both aspects, and cannot ignore the possibility of damaging its principles by allowing economic development to outstrip the slow and laborious process of social change. My days in Tamilnad more than ever brought out the reality of this problem.

I had already been told in Madurai that the District Dan celebration had been postponed, so that when I reached Tinneveli I was taken to some villages and to meet one or two persons of interest. Tinneveli is a pleasant small town surrounded on all sides by paddy fields. In February the lush green against a background of coconut palms under a blue sky was soothing and beautiful.

On our way to Melapoovani we picked up the worker responsible for the villages in this area. On arrival we walked through the village before gathering with some members of the village council in the multi-spindle spinning centre. Most of the houses were mere huts, with occasional pukka constructions in between, normally not belonging to Gramdanis. I noticed house numbering on some of the doors. It was a backward village of Harijans, with a total of 130 families and a population of 550 people, an average of only 4 members to each family. I therefore enquired about family planning, and was told that nine men had undergone vasectomy two years ago. This cannot, therefore, have had any telling effect and I began to doubt the accuracy of the figures, particularly after one man told me he had seven children, another two, and others any number in between.

Gramdan was declared in 1965 because 'by joining, the villagers would be able to improve their lot, they would get help to irrigate their land'. Some 300 acres out of a total of 450 are under cultivation, mainly paddy, cotton, maize and other cereals. The villagers talked about a new feeling of oneness, that they had done away with money-lenders, and were settling their differences among themselves. There is no common fund as such for distribution among everyone. Only those who

contribute benefit, those who are unable to do so are no better off than before. There has been no land distribution, and farming continues on an individual basis. Multi-spindle spinning wheels have been plying for 18 months and 26 women are spinning, exchanging yarn for cloth, a saving of Rs. 52 on saris for each of the 26 families last year.

When we were driving away from the village the worker commented how helpful he had found the questions and our discussion on Gramdan principles which followed. He was a sincere person who, I felt, could do a much better job of work after further intensified training in community development, and with a wider understanding of Gramdan principles.

We reached Tuticorin in time for lunch. The town was in the throes of student unrest, riots, processions and stone-throwing, as Mr. Subramaniam, former Union Food Minister had come there on that very day. The students were objecting to his comment a few days earlier that they were not interested in studying but only in receiving their degrees without working for them. While politicians were ensconced in meetings my companions were trying to arrange for me to meet Shri Venkatakrishnan, an influential citizen of the town and the local representative of the 'Hindu', a national English language paper. We passed the waiting period by driving the few miles to the new harbour of Tuticorin, still under construction, which will facilitate a new shipping route; an impressive project of land reclamation and a new township in the making. The newly constructed road between the old and new port led through a vast area of sea-water beds used for salt extraction, and the expanse of white salt shimmered and glittered blindingly in the heat.

On our return Shri Venkatakrishnan was still not available, and we went to a coffee house for some light refreshment. There we got into conversation with a group of students. They were pugnacious and argumentative to begin with. After a while they began to listen, and we had a constructive discussion. By the time of parting the students had become thoughtful young people clamouring for help and guidance. This small incident brought out vividly an urgent need for Sarvodaya workers and other responsible people to mingle with students



in their meeting places, draw them into conversation and discuss with them means of solving their problems other than by violent demonstrations.

We reached Shri Venkatakrishnan's house and settled down to wait for his return from the 'Hindu' office where he was dashing off his report on the day's disturbances. I had a brief conversation with a school teacher, a member of his household. She told me that teaching today was fruitless. There was no discipline amongst the children, nor could she enforce it. Any teacher who tried was faced with violence and a walk-out. The young were simply following the example of their elders. The truth of this statement was borne out by what had happened to us earlier in the afternoon when schoolboys had blocked our road, fanned out, surrounded our car, but let us go when they realised that we did not belong to the town.

When Shri Venkatakrishnan eventually turned up it was evening. Our time had not been wasted as my meeting with him was certainly worthwhile. He was a genuine supporter of Sarvodaya but had a critical and objective approach, which was constructive and valid.

I asked about Tinneveli District Dan, whether its declaration would have any effect on the local administration, and if so what changes could be foreseen. To this he replied that the declaration of District Dan was a mere paper transaction with no meaning, that it had been done too hastily. Those villagers who had signed the declaration had no clear idea what Gramdan really stood for, nor did the present workers know enough themselves, and untrained workers were a menace. He considered intensive training of workers of the utmost importance. The principles must be clearly understood, he stated emphatically: for in his view Sarvodaya and Gramdan were the only alternative to the present social and economic pattern for India. He thought that before District Dan was declared, towns and cities should be brought in, and so far no formula for working in urban areas had been evolved. This frank appraisal gave me much to think about.

Shri Venkatakrishnan was very much concerned about the situation in Tuticorin, and with some like-minded friends started a campaign against violence. This group of men worked

cut a pledge which they had printed on a leaflet. They distributed these from door to door, explained the meaning of the pledge to the house-holders, and told them that they would call again in a few days' time to make sure that they had understood their commitment. Already thousands of signatures had been obtained. The campaign was geared towards instilling a sense of civil discipline and social responsibility in the townsmen.

We talked for a long time and in great detail about the implications of Gramdan and Sarvodaya and the need for action based on a sound knowledge of the principles involved. He repeatedly referred to Tinneveli District Dan as having been declared in a hurry, that it had no meaning and should never have been carried out in this unplanned way.

I have listened to other friends of the movement since then who were of the same opinion, who stated that apart from a minority, people in the district knew nothing of Gramdan, or its meaning, or anything about District Dan; and that the hundred Gramdanis from Batlagundu who had been recruited and sent to the Tinneveli District at some expense had not been very helpful. They had either appealed to the villagers' emotions by asking them to sign the declaration for the sake of Vinobaji, or for the sake of obtaining foreign aid, neither approach being commendable.

On the following day I was told that we were visiting a rich mixed caste village. We arrived and I was shown into the shed where 20 women and girls were spinning on multi-spindles. They are paid Re. 1 to Rs. 1.50 per day, the same wage which they could earn by field work. But here they are assured of an income all the year round. All the spinners were Harijans. They knew something about the village council but never attended any of the meetings as custom forbade them to leave their houses in the evenings when they were being held. I walked round the village which looked poor, the people backward. Out of the 120 families three belonged to the scheduled caste, one to the barber caste, most others were Nadars. Gramdan was declared in 1965, and the village council was formed a year later. Fifty families are landless. Out of 100 acres under cultivation 30 are wet land, that is irrigated. There has so far

been no land distribution, nor is there any communal farming. There is no village fund. A well has been constructed with free labour, financed by Meyer's Needy Fund; and twenty men from the village attended a three-day training camp a year ago. I had expected a village where rich landowners and poor had joined in declaring Gramdan, but there were no rich landowners here.

We came next to the village of Kundamkulan. Hundreds of Painter storks and pelicans have chosen Kundamkulan for a stopover on their migratory flight. They swayed on the branches of trees and floated in large flocks on the pond, unaware of the troubled waters beneath them. For at Kundamkulan ugly things were taking place. They overshadowed my two days in the area and were under constant discussion. I found it difficult at first to understand what was happening. There was trouble between the Gramdanis and the landlords. 'Was this a Gramdan village?' I asked. 'Yes'. 'Why then was the dispute not settled by the village council?' 'The landlords had not joined Gramdan'. 'How many had joined?' 'The sixty families in trouble'. 'How many landlords?' 'Ninety families'. 'Then it isn't a Gramdan village, is it?' 'No, there are 120 families altogether'. 'That still does not make it a Gramdan village'. To everyone of my questions I got different answers. Even before this I had occasion to feel uneasy about the accuracy of statements made with respect to the requirements for a village to be declared a Gramdan one. It seemed that in Kundamkulan only the weaker section had declared Gramdan, and rather than uniting the whole village had split it wide open into two camps.

There was a large area of government wasteland between the village and a pond belonging to another village. Both landlords and Gramdanis had illegally cultivated the land. The landlords had made their application some years ago and had obtained 'patta' (title-deeds for this land). The Gramdanis had made no application, and had been paying the customary penalty for the last eight years. It is doubtful if their application, had it been made, would have been granted as their land was too near the pond. Any raising of the pond would flood the area, and their land was needed as a safety margin.\*

It was difficult to know why relationships between the Gramdanis and the landlords had become strained unless one assumed that Gramdan had brought changes which loosened the stranglehold of the landlords over their labourers, and they were trying to get them evicted, in order to exact further labour from them.

During the past years and with the permission of the landlords the Gramdanis irrigated their land from the Kundamkulan tank which was fed by an irrigation canal controlled by sluices. The landlords had withheld water on and off for the last three years.

Shri Kutti, a Sarvodaya worker, was in the neighbourhood during the month of December conducting a padyatra (walking from village to village) and consolidating Gramdan in the district by forming village councils. News reached him that the landlords were going to destroy the Gramdanis' paddy crop in an attempt to subject the people to their will. They had already withheld irrigation facilities for the present crop. He rushed to Kundamkulam but was too late. By the time he arrived on the 28th December 1967, the bunds and fields had been trampled by bullocks and the paddy cut down by hundreds of the landlords' supporters with the physical assistance of the police. Prior to the operation, police officials had been royally entertained in the landlords' houses for two days.

Kutti offered satyagraha on the disputed land for two days, whereupon the landlords asked the revenue officials to declare Sec. 144 (forbidding gatherings of more than five people). A local worker approached the assistant collector and explained the situation. The declaration of Sec. 144 was withheld. The landlords then asked the revenue officials, the assistant collector and Kutti for a talk in the village. Kutti explained the purpose of his satyagraha in the presence of all the villagers, and asked for an immediate supply of water. The landlords claimed that there was not sufficient water in the pond. Kutti insisted that he would not move from the land until water was supplied. At his insistence the landlords promised to grant his request. Kutti returned to his padyatra. The Gramdanis asked every day for resumption of their water supply, but in vain. Twenty days passed. The landlords maintained that there was not sufficient

water in the pond and they could do nothing until water from the canal was fed into it, but they made no move to apply for this.

Mr. Chandapillai and Mr. Ponniah, area workers from Tinneveli, appealed to the P.W.D. Engineer and also approached Shri Subharayaylu Reddiar, chairman of the Nanguneni Panchayat Union. Another week passed until the canal sluice was opened. The Union Chairman had promised that he would see to it that on opening of the sluice the Gramdanis would get their water supply. He also suggested to the Gramdanis to dig small pits in their fields to reach the water level as a means for irrigating their remaining crop which had escaped destruction. When the water from the canal flowed into the pond the landlords forcibly closed the pond sluice gate and posted a man on guard over it. The water from the canal was side-tracked to another village pond.

This news worried Kutti, and with the support of the area workers he began an eight-day fast on the disputed land in the hope of awakening the conscience of the people. As a counter action one of the landlords undertook a two-day fast not far away, the same man who six months earlier had provoked the Gramdanis by telling them: Next year you will not have your land to cultivate, it will be mine.

In a last effort to save the paddy the Gramdanis began to dig a well instead of small pits. This could not go unchallenged a well on the land would legalise the Gramdanis' holding under existing law and the Gramdanis had no licence to dig a well. So the revenue officials brought the police along who stopped all work on the well. When the Gramdanis refused to give an undertaking that they would not continue, ten of them were arrested. The men went quietly. This happened on 12th February. I got the detailed story from Kutti himself, for we had gone to Kundamkulan to see him. The sight of the Gramdanis' trampled crop against the upright lush paddy crop of the landlords was a pathetic one. We found Kutti on his charpoy under a temporary shelter. He looked drawn and tired, and was running a temperature, but was in good spirits otherwise and hopeful that his fast would produce a change of attitude among the landlords and make an impact on the whole neighbourhood.

As we left Kutti we talked for a few moments to a couple of policemen who stood guard at a distance in case of any disturbance. They were sympathetic to Kutti and scornful of the landlord's two-day fast. 'No rich man can go without food for more than 48 hours', they declared with derision.

When I reached Batlagundu nearly two weeks later I enquired immediately what had been the outcome at Kundamkulam. I was told that the men had been released on bail, and the collector was checking the water supply to judge whether the landlords were in their right. There had also been a suggestion that the Gramdanis should be given alternate land to avoid further difficulties and the threat of eviction. I thought this to be a reasonable solution, particularly as there was no hope of obtaining 'patta' for ten acres under dispute, but Shri Jaganathan, who headed the Gramdan work in Tamilnad, would not agree. If the landlords could bribe the authorities to declare their land 'Patta' then the Gramdanis should have the same chance after eight years of cultivation and not be evicted. I am afraid I did not think this sort of argument helpful. Even if such land occupation was the accepted custom, if there was no chance of legalising it, then the offer of alternative land should be accepted. Any other course would surely lead to further trouble and could not be supported by the principles for which Sarvodaya stood. But I was assured that Kutti's fast had created a change in the prevailing climate and sympathy with the Gramdanis in neighbouring villages. The pressure was on and the same situation was not likely to arise again.

I had toured Kerala before reaching the small Block town of Batlagundu. When reaching the South, at first I had been impressed by its greater cleanliness, but after Kerala the sight of Batlagundu came as a shock. Dirt, dust, the condition of the animals, neglect and abject poverty distressed me and it took most of my week's stay to adjust to it.

It still comes as a constant surprise to me how Indian men and women can function under the most appalling conditions, and in circumstances which leave me helpless to know where to begin and how to cope. I thought so long ago when in the squalid little town of Gaya in Bihar. It was then the rainy season and the roads were slushy dirt tracks mixed with animal

excreta and garbage which splashed up one's legs and soiled one's clothes. Yet amongst all this wet mess, men and women stepped out of their houses in clean white trousers and shirts, in freshly laundered saris, looking immaculately groomed. How did they do it? Clothes washed under a tap or from a bucket of water and rubbed on a stone. No wash tub, no hot water! It was just the same in Batlagundu where instead of the monsoon the hot wind blew dust and dirt into one's sweat-soaked clothes. But without fail the staff turned up at the office daily in fresh clean garments, while I struggled with the office facilities which just about defeated me. They were the worst that I had encountered anywhere, unless it was that I stayed there longer and they therefore impressed themselves more acutely on my memory. But I don't think so. If anything they made me more keenly aware how badly the vitally important subject of environmental sanitation was still being neglected. This and other observations led me gradually to form some very definite opinions regarding women's and children's programmes.

Shri Avaiyan was in charge of the Batlagundu office. He had prepared a programme for me which would have taken me to three or four villages daily. Having heard so much about Batlagundu and read so many reports I felt this to be unnecessary and time and energy consuming. I asked to be shown certain aspects of the work, i.e. good agriculture, village industries, in fact all those activities which would highlight my impressions of Gramdan.

I was first taken to Old Batlagundu, a village some two miles from the town, and shown the nursery class in action. There were a great many toddlers eating a most unpalatable-looking wheat concoction. I was shown the time-table which began with the children being collected and given a wash by the nursery teachers. At a meeting later in the week I had an opportunity of discussing the nursery work.

We walked through the village and talked to the people, among them Mayandi who has been the secretary of the village council since 1964. This was formed in 1962, Gramdan having been declared in 1958. Out of a total of 1,207 families 678 families are represented by the village council. Of those who joined 50% are Harijans, 50% upper caste. They own 300 acres

out of a total of 852. All land is under cultivation. Joint farming was tried by dividing the land into 15-20 acres of dry and wet land to be cultivated by 24 groups of three to four families. According to the speaker they could not support the landless by this method and reverted to individual farming in 1962. The landless are still landless and in the words of the man in the 'pink shirt': 'I am no better off now than ten years ago and have the same old difficulties'.

Some 207 members of the Gramsabha belong to the agricultural co-operative society. Of these, 15 families own between five to ten acres, 20 four acres, 22 three acres, 30 two acres, and 120 one acre. Of those who have not joined four families are tenant farmers of absentee landlords, 15 share-croppers, five have five acres each, four four acres, 20 two acres, 60 one acre each.

In answer to my standard question, what is Gramdan, I was told: 'It means living prosperously, land should not be sold away but remain the property of the village, it is, in fact, a protection of the land. We also thought that by joining Gramdan we would get help'. The man who made this statement had given one acre to another who, unfortunately, has no money to start farming. So the recipient told us. The man in the pink shirt had been promised an acre of land for the last three years but said he still hadn't got it. I asked why there was no proper land distribution. It seems that all the land was put into the co-operative society and mortgaged against loans for development and cannot, therefore, be distributed.

If the villagers are better off it is due to fewer court cases. Caste differences have narrowed down, but according to the villagers Gramdan has made little difference otherwise.

I was puzzled at the figures which I was given by the secretary of the village council. Gramdan was declared in 1958 when it was the policy that all the villagers should be prepared to join, but even under 'Gramdan made easy' Old Batlagundu did not fulfil the necessary conditions that at least 75% should sign the declaration and 50% of the land be donated to the community.

We proceeded to Kottaypatti nearby, a much smaller village. Fifty families out of 70 joined Gramdan. Why? They



knew the ideals of Vinoba and thought that by joining Gramdan they would get help which in fact happened. They were badly in debt and thought it better to lose their land to the community than to outsiders. They too tried group farming, but failed because the landless didn't turn up for work regularly. The landless in their turn said that they had no faith in the landowners and didn't believe what they were told by them. There was no unity and they too reverted back to individual farming.

• Here, in contrast to the usual pattern, the landowners had joined Gramdan, whereas the landless Harijans were coming in only gradually for they had not thought Gramdan feasible, nor had they then trusted the landlords. It was interesting to observe that even if the landowners had little land—no more than 5 acres at the most—the rift between them and the landless labourers was formidable.

The Rev. Dick Keithahn, an American missionary, started an ashram at Kanavoipatti in 1957 on five acres of land donated by a Muslim absentee landlord for that purpose. A further five acres were purchased later on from the same Muslim. It seems this Muslim has a large land-holding in the village. His fields looked prosperous and well tended. After nine years Dick Keithahn left the ashram to live at a medical fellowship not far away, but he is still the president of the village council. I asked what impact the ashram has had on the village and was told: 'Many foreigners came to the ashram and then came along to see the village, so outside help came to the village through the ashram.'

Today the ashram land and buildings were beginning to look neglected; one building was slowly disintegrating. I saw tomato plants unstaked, the fruit rotting on the ground. On the ashram side of the village ten acres of government wasteland were obtained five years ago for planting cash crops to benefit the village council. A well was dug with funds from War-on-Want to irrigate five acres, but needed deepening by another 12-15 feet at an additional cost of Rs. 4,000.

Gramdan was declared in 1957 when 150 families out of a total of 250 signed the declaration. Of these 40 families are landless. The 110 landowners cultivate 40 acres out of 260.

After much discussion and many confused answers I found out that out of a total of 620 acres belonging to the village 320 acres are owned by 16 absentee landlords who employ agricultural labour. At the office I looked at an undated survey report of Kanavoipatti in an attempt to verify these figures. But this and other surveys at which I looked subsequently, never indicated whether these embraced the whole village or that part which had declared Gramdan, and were therefore not very helpful. Fifteen acres have been distributed to fifteen of the landless families which they say is not enough for them to live on. All land is individually cultivated. To my question why the land was not pooled various objections were put forward. Firstly that most of the land was encumbered and mortgaged, and secondly that all land, even individual holdings, were fragmented. I asked if it wasn't possible to exchange and redistribute the land to make cultivation more economic and profitable, but was told that if they did this some poor land would be obtained by some in exchange for good land. This last argument seemed to me to be a long way from the Gramdan ideal of share and share alike.

As elsewhere disputes were settled among the villagers themselves, including Gramdanis and non-Gramdanis.

A Sarvodaya co-operative society was founded in 1958 with 123 members. According to the Co-operative Act, only landowners are allowed to take up loans and although the landless could become members and share in the benefit, the landowners are held responsible for repayments. Therefore the admittance of the landless would add a risk which they were not prepared to take.

A milk co-operative was set up jointly with another village and is working well, with a daily turnover of Rs. 300. Of the profits 50% go to the reserve fund, 7% to the common good fund of both villages, 2% for supervision. No dividends have as yet been paid to members but are used to increase the share capital. The main advantage of the co-operative is assured marketing facilities.

Future development work was to bring all the wasteland under cultivation. The wasteland too is fragmented. There are now 11 wells irrigating 40 acres. The income from the cash crop

grown on the ten acres reclaimed government wasteland was intended to finance the reclamation work. There is also a five acre mango orchard under common ownership.

The nursery teacher worked also with the women's society. They meet every Wednesday evening. Each of the 25 members contributes Re. 1 per week. By drawing lots one member is given Rs. 24 each week for some household purchases, and Re. 1 goes into a common kitty for entertaining outsiders. The women have a programme of songs and music, and are taught sewing and some cooking. They would like a 'bathroom' for the village and latrines. This request was an encouraging step forward as long as training in how to use such facilities was not neglected. From the appearance of those that I had seen this was a task of utmost urgency. Regarding food—'No, they were no better off since Gramdan'. 'But the men said they had more to eat these days', I queried. 'Oh, men will always say that', came the rejoinder in full chorus.

At Batlagundu I had a long talk with Shri Avaiyan, for by now I was considerably perturbed. In 1958 when most of the villages had declared Gramdan it should have meant 100% participation by the villagers. In none of these villages had this been achieved. What was happening in the villages in the Batlagundu Block and elsewhere was neither in accordance with total Gramdan nor with 'Gramdan made easy', the 75% requisite of participation. I asked how many villages had been legalised under the Bhoodan/Gramdan Act which in Tamilnad requires that two-thirds of the villagers sign the Gramdan declaration *or* (not *and*) 50% of the landholdings be donated to the village community. Out of the Gramdan villages in the Batlagundu Block only two had been legalised under the Act and only sixteen out of the total in the area. 'But', explained Shri Avaiyan, 'for our purpose they are Gramdan villages'.

Later in Madras I put this point to Shri Arunachalam, a senior Sarvodaya leader, very much involved in the Gramdan movement in Tamilnad. By sheer coincidence he had that morning had a meeting with Government officials to finalise an amendment to the Bhoodan/Gramdan Act on precisely this issue. He also assured me that more recently declared Gramdan villages fulfilled the necessary requisites.

Before seeing any more villages I visited the Rural Textile Centre at a small neighbouring town, which was set up in 1967 by the Batlagundu office with the help of the Khadi Commission. Cotton is grown locally but sold in the open market, for there is no ginning facility nearby. So the supply of processed cotton for the centre is bought from the Khadi Commission's ginning plant at Tirupur near Coimbatore. Some 36 girls and one man from the town and nearby villages are employed in processing cotton from carding to spun yarn. They are paid according to output during an 8 hour day, approximately Rs. 2-Rs. 2.50. The yarn is collected by the Khadi store at Batlagundu and sent to Tirupur for weaving. Some 8,400 hanks of 28 gms (1 oz.) are produced monthly and sold at 45 np. each. At present the 'Rural Textile Centre' is no more than a means of giving employment to 37 people, and far removed from approaching the goal of village self-sufficiency in cloth. It is in no way related to local market needs or conditions.

I had asked to be taken to a village where 100% Gramdan had been achieved and where it was functioning in accordance with the commitment made by the villagers when signing the declaration. So we went to Chellampatti, a village about six miles distance from Batlagundu. The fields looked well tended, the crops stood high and were an encouraging sight. The village gave an impression of cleanliness. Most of the buildings were of mud and showed signs of poverty. We walked to the new well under construction. The people stopped work and we talked to them. They were exceptionally friendly and offered us 'tender coconut' by the well site. After this refreshing drink we returned to the village, and the usual discussion followed.

There are 45 Hindu families—210 people—living at Chellampatti. They first heard about Gramdan when Vinoba visited the district in 1956. They thought that by declaring Gramdan (in 1959) they would all live and work together and have a better life. The village council was formed two years later. The 70 acres of land are owned by 37 families. They have roughly two acres each. Since the declaration of Gramdan there has been greater sharing of labour, but the landless have remained landless and continue to work as coolies. There was some talk now about giving two-thirds of an acre to each of the landless

families. In spite of a fair amount of work sharing there is no equal distribution of the harvest, no village grain store or village fund.

A co-operative society was formed several years ago but has become defunct, for the loan of Rs. 10,000 was never repaid. It was spent on manure, bullocks and repayment of individual debts. Funds from War-on-Want were spent in like fashion: Rs. 2,500 on settling debts, Rs. 2,500 on the purchase of bullocks, sheep and goats for the benefit of individuals. Decisions as to who was to benefit were taken by the village council. The repayment of the debts was dealt with by the area organiser, the buying of live-stock by the individual villager and checked by the Batlagundu office. For festivals and special occasions collections are made among the villagers. Few adults are literate, but all the school-age children attend classes.

• One man said that there has been no progress since Gramdan, whereas the chairman of the village council claimed that the villagers have had some benefits, mainly through the clearance of debts. He himself built a pukka house in 1961 at a cost of Rs. 7,000 with Rs. 4,000 of his own money and a loan of Rs. 3,000 at 40% interest. Although the men claimed that they had enough to eat, the women—in their presence—stated that they were no better off. 'We have sufficient food for ten days, inadequate supply for 20 days and at times go without food for three or four days,' they said. 'Gramdan has done us no good, it has stopped us taking up new loans to make life easier!'

When I had first entered the village I had felt happy at seeing so many promising signs. Now I felt crushed by disappointment. I was saddened by the lack of real implementation of Gramdan in a village where conditions pointed in the right direction, where our lengthy discussions on the true principles of Gramdan were received with thoughtfulness, where a constructive follow-up of our visit would result in the desired changes of social attitude. The seeds have been sown. In spite of their statement there had quite obviously been economic improvement, but the people's aspirations had also been raised. The time was right and the people were ready. The Gramdan village worker was with us. He was responsible for twelve villages, was

trained in village industries for 2 years by the Khadi Commission and for three months in agriculture at Gandhigram. For him Gramdan was a means of securing the existing land within the village and preventing absentee landlords and money-lenders' from buying the indebted villagers out. How could he be more effective with such limited training and his heavy work load?

Kunnuvarankottai is a large mixed-caste village on the banks of a river and spread either side of the main road. Out of a total of 350 families 175 joined Gramdan in 1958. Some 100 families are landless, and there is little land, only 175 acres. The village council and a co-operative society are functioning well. The latter is mainly concerned with hand pounding, employing 3 men and 20 women at Rs. 2.25 per bag of pounded rice—two days' work. The chairman was a man of strong character and a good leader who had his debt paid off by outside aid after Gramdan was declared, since when he has done well. We were meeting in his 'pukka' house, which included the luxury of an electric fan. He had joined Gramdan because he believed in its 'high ideals'. He gave half an acre to a landless family out of his ten acres of land. By vesting these in the co-operative society they benefit the whole community, enabling them to take up loans. But here too there is no communal farming.

Deva Rajan owns two acres. Since joining Gramdan a well has been dug on his land and he now harvests three crops a year whereas before he could not even grow one full crop. In his turn he gives time and labour to the village council. He took part in the Satyagraha in 1964, organised by the Sarvodaya office in protest against the holders of some temple land who were extracting free labour from their tillers. The Satyagraha was not a total success but the tillers got the cultivation rights for seven acres out of 36. Some 700 of the Satyagraha participants went to jail for one week. From all accounts this week of community living, working, and studying of Sarvodaya subjects, proved of great value to all those imprisoned. It underlined the importance of work camps by bringing people together and preparing the ground for a deeper understanding of common difficulties and the solutions offered through Gramdan and Sarvodaya principles.

There were non-Gramdanis at our meeting, listening to our discussion. About 106 acres of government wasteland has been distributed to 40 individual landless families. They have no implements with which to cultivate their land, and the village council will loan them bullocks with which to make a start. An equal amount of government wasteland has been distributed to non-Gramdani landless.

Here as elsewhere grain and cash are only collected in cases of special need. The village council arranges for village cleaning once a month. They settle their own disputes and pass judgement as in the case of the villager who misbehaved with another's wife. She, in self-defence, beat him with a broom. The Gram Sabha enquired into every detail and decided that this 'breach of the peace' had only happened because the culprit was not living regularly with his own wife. He was exiled from the village for a period of six months to prove his 'worthiness' for readmittance into the village community by leading a 'happy life' with his own wife. Later the sentence was remitted to three months, and now all seems to be marital harmony.

The present day status symbol in the villages is the radio and as many loudspeakers as finances will allow. So the deafening sound of film music blared forth in cacophony as we made our way through the village and across the river bed to neighbouring Sekkapatti. 'Is it a Gramdan village?' I asked Shri Avaiyan. 'Yes,' he replied. 'I mean proper Gramdan?' I queried. 'Well, almost,' came the reply. 'What do you mean by almost?' I asked again. 'We call it Gramdan for our purpose', he said. In fact only 75 families out of a total of two hundred families signed the Gramdan declaration in 1963. Out of a total of 400 acres, 90 belong to the Gramdanis. Some 17 families among the Gramdanis are landless or have only one-fifth acre of land. A tenth of an acre of land has been given to each of seven landless families on an individual basis. The most encouraging feature here has been the sound way in which the Rs. 5,000 from War-on-Want has been utilized. One and one-tenth acre of good land was purchased for betelnut cultivation, one of the most remunerative cash crops in the district. With the profit another plot has already been bought and further purchases are planned. All future profits will go to the village

council for the benefit of the Gramdanis. The men with whom we talked were full of enterprise and determination, and I would have liked to talk with them at greater length. But we had visited the M.P. for Dindigul, a son of the village, and it was time to catch the bus back to Batlagundu.

The time spent with the M.P. was not wasted. We met him in his family home, a typical, well-constructed village house where we were offered hot sweet milk which tasted of the acrid smoke of charcoal burners. The M.P. was a youngish man of about 30 years of age, immaculately turned out in white lungi, shirt and silk scarf across his shoulder. If I had met him in Delhi in his official capacity I would never have connected him with rural India, and I thought how easily one forgets that many like him come from the villages, that they are first generation city dwellers, that their sophistication has been only recently acquired and that their children will constitute the brain-drain from the villages. He was reserved and guarded in all that he said but thawed a little as we talked and lost some of his defensive attitude towards our group. He represents the D.M.K., and was full of political slogans which he brought out pat to any question. He said he did not know that part of his village had accepted Gramdan. This may or may not have been a pose. He certainly had no time for Sarvodaya workers whose leaders he claimed were Congress agents and had vested interests. I would have liked to talk with him without the presence of my Sarvodaya friends. He might have opened up a little more.

The next three days involved me in the CORAGS (Committee on Relief and Gift Supplies sponsored by the National Christian Council) programme and gave me an insight into the powerful influence still exercised by Dick Keithahn, who had come to the district as a missionary more than 40 years ago, although he himself believes that he has withdrawn sufficiently by no longer living at Kanavoipatti.

CORAGS wheat was already used for the feeding programme in the nursery classes. But rather than issue large quantities of wheat to the villagers in the form of drought relief a two-year well-digging programme was worked out on the usual food for work pattern, in consultation with the presidents of the



village councils. But the final decision and responsibility rests with Dick Keithahn who is the link between the Nirman office and the CORAGS' representatives in Madras. The project covers two areas and commenced in April 1967. In the Batlagundu Block 30 wells are being dug in 559 acres of government wasteland to benefit 21 Gramdan villages. After ten years of cultivation these lands will be given 'patta'. The scheme ran into difficulties for lack of technical know-how. A water diviner had located the sites for digging, which was undertaken by the villagers under the supervision of the Gramdan workers. Work was stopped, and a young engineer appointed by CORAGS arrived about 6 weeks ago. He undertook a survey of the whole programme. He happens to be an exceptionally pleasant person, and was working in well with the Sarvodaya staff, although he was encountering a good deal of resentment by the villagers. For stoppage of work also meant stoppage of wheat supply, and this had become a constant bone of contention among the villagers. While visiting villages during the earlier half of my stay the question of the wheat distribution came up at each of our meetings, mainly to the effect that 'there was the wheat and they could not get hold of it' which seemed to cause a lot of bitter feelings and discontent.

On the first day we toured the Batlagundu area for the purpose of checking the wells. In the evening I attended a meeting of the village council at Kottaipatti when most of the talking regarding the well and wheat programme was done by the chairman. The only other man who spoke briefly was a relation of his.

In contrast, at the meeting at Kanavoipatti later on the same evening everybody spoke, and at once, in rebellion against Dick Keithahn's suggestion that it was time members of the village council began repayment of their loans.

On the following day we toured the Usilampatti area where, as at Batlagundu, Block Dan had been declared, 90 out of 120 villages in the block participating. A number of these villages declared Gramdan many years ago, others as recently as 1968 as Nagayagoundanpatti where 55 out of 75 families declared Gramdan in January 1968. The Gram Sabha was formed on the 26th February and we were there on the 29th. Out of a

total of 500 acres 300 belong to the Gramdanis. This village too will be covered by the CORAGS programme, and one cannot help wondering how much this has contributed to persuade the villagers to sign the declaration. I was introduced to a villager who had just donated one acre of land. He owns five acres adjacent to two acres of government wasteland given to two landless families. His one acre will be added to the two acres of wasteland and a well will be dug under the CORAGS programme to irrigate the total seven acres of the three families involved. It remains an open question whether his donation was an implementation of Gramdan principles or a mere business transaction. For his remaining four acres under irrigation will give him a yield equivalent to at least eight acres with double cropping or twelve acres if there is sufficient water for treble cropping. Nevertheless, whatever his motivation, there will have to be a development of group consciousness among the three families involved, a good basis on which to build further action.

The villages in the Usilampatti Block are mainly inhabited by Kallars, a 'criminal tribe' who used to lead a nomadic existence but have now been settled for several generations. At Mothiveeranpatti the government built a housing colony for the 22 families in 1961. The government grant amounted to Rs. 750 per house towards a contribution of Rs. 250 by each family. They were built by outside labour under contract, the contractor being one of the villagers. The housing colony made a pleasant sight, more so than the Harijan houses built with aid from War-on-Want funds at Konyampatti. When I commented on this I was told that the Harijan houses had been built burglar-proof because of the village's close proximity to the Kallars. The latter's attractive tiled roofs gave easy access by simply lifting off some of the tiles.

I found the tribal people rather delightful. They showed a lively intelligence and were full of excitement and expectation at what was happening to them. In one village we were greeted with a chorus of hooting reminiscent of ancient war cries. It seems that the very tendencies which united these people in their criminal ventures would now help in unifying their efforts in constructive work under Gramdan.

In the afternoon we attended a meeting in the multi-spindle spinning centre at the block village of Usilampatti. The meeting had been called at 3 o'clock for the purpose of selecting office bearers from the chairmen of the village councils to form the committee which was to assist in the implementation of the well programme.

We arrived just before 4 p.m. and proceedings began an hour later. The villagers introduced themselves and a worker introduced our small party. Shri Jaganathan then delivered an hour's speech. In the course of this he chided the men for having accepted government aid for their housing colony which had marked them as Kallars and criminal tribes. It would have been better, he pointed out, to refuse the government grant. Personally I could see no difference between the construction of a Harijan colony and a tribal one, particularly as the former were also not very happy at their housing classification.

Shri Jaganathan's address was followed by further lengthy speeches by different workers, including Dick Keithahn. At 7.30 p.m. I asked whether we would now have the elections for which the meeting had been called. 'No', came the reply. 'It is now much too late. We will call another meeting in a month's time'. I was a little perturbed by this but no one else seemed to mind. Long speeches among some people seem to be an occupational necessity !

On the next day the Batlagundu village council chairmen and officers of the CORAGS implementation committee had their meeting at the office. There was not much opportunity for making speeches. The men with almost one voice demanded higher wheat payment for their labour. "If 'Sarvodaya' won't give it to us we will go elsewhere," they said. Each man then came forward with a request for the number of wells in his village. It was a heated meeting and lasted for several hours. Finally it was agreed that the committee should assess the work of the labourers. This was to be checked by the workers and the wheat distribution to be settled on this basis.

As if to make good any negative impression the following incident came to light. Three members of a Gramdan village sold their CORAGS wheat to an outsider. The village council not only retrieved the wheat but extracted a fine of Rs. 20 from

each of the three men as a penalty, and decided that none of them would be hired for future well digging under any circumstances.

I had a meeting with the nursery teachers working in the Batlagundu Block on the same day. By then I had seen a number of nurseries in action. Each one reflected the quality of the teacher and her assistant. A few of them had attempted women's programmes. None of these dealt sufficiently with the fundamental need for environmental sanitation which is basic to improving the health and living standards in the villages. The women at Kanavoipatti had asked for bathrooms and latrines. Unless they were taught how to use these correctly and look after them, their use would increase rather than diminish disease and infection.

At Kottaipatti I had seen a one-year-old child suffering from acute malnutrition, looking like a baby no more than three months old and as weak. I asked if small babies were given milk powder. 'No, the mothers took them to the fields and did not return until after the time of the milk feeding programme at 3.45 p.m.' 'Why not adjust the time-table?', I asked. No answer. 'Who had worked out the time-table?' It then appeared that this had been laid down by the Project Implementation Committee in 1959, had been adopted without any adjustment and irrespective of local needs in every village, and had never been changed. The time-table is here reproduced:

Morning:	8-00— 9-00	Collecting children from homes
	9-00— 9-20	Children—Toilet and Wash
	9-20— 9-30	Morning Prayer
	9-30— 9-50	Free conversation with children
	9-50—10-20	Out-of-door free play
	10-20—10-30	Cleaning of face, hands and legs
	10-30—10-40	Children's songs
	10-40—10-55	Story-telling
	10-55—11-15	Organised work:—Clay work and Paper folding
	11-15—11-30	Cleaning of face, hands and legs
	11-30—12-00	Noon Meals
Afternoon:	12-00— 3-00	Letting the children rest and sleep

3-00—3-15	Children-Toilet and Wash
3-15—3-45	Organised play—indoor games
3-45—4-05	Milk feeding
4-05—4-15	Children-Toilet and Wash
	National Song

I then queried the educational value of collecting the children and taking over the mothers' entire responsibility for their cleanliness and feeding, again to be told that the women went to the fields before they had time to care for their offspring. They often left their homes at 4 o'clock in the morning while the children were still asleep. This may be so in many cases, but it does not solve the problem how to involve the mothers and train them in child-care, which is an essential part of social education and social change.

The teachers are willing but insufficiently trained, too close to the village level from which they have come to have the capacity to raise standards. The supervisor too is caught up in the same living conditions. For instance they knew that they should teach the use of ash instead of mud for cleaning eating vessels, but did not know why. There is need and scope for a professional social worker, a woman with dynamism, vision and imagination to organise an effective welfare programme. The constructive work has laid the right foundation for such a programme to be effective. It would consolidate and further village unity and bring about social change on a broad basis. Whenever I had an opportunity of talking with groups of women I found them responsive. There is one other wide gap in the programme as at present executed. Any improved habits which the children may have acquired during their attendance at nursery classes may linger on during their brief five years of primary school attendance. It will certainly get lost during the most formative years of their lives—eleven to marriage. A programme for this age group is of the first priority if Sarvodaya ideas and cleaner and better living habits are to create the kind of society for which the movement is working.

Before continuing my travels I accepted Shri Chandapillai's invitation to visit his home and meet his wife. Dr. Thankamma Chandapillai is one of three doctors attached to the Pambanar

Tea Estate near Peermade in the Kottayam District of Kerala. We left Batlagundu by bus. The latter part of the journey took us up into the hills on the Tamilnad side along the Vaigai Dam Project and down into the tea plantations on the Kerala side. The heat and squalor of the plains gave way to cool air and the green freshness of higher altitudes, and brought with it an astonishing transformation. The Chandapillais live in an old-style colonial bungalow standing in a lovely garden, tended by the estate gardeners and surrounded by a beautiful landscape. Dr. Thankamma had a call to the estate hospital, and we accompanied her. The buildings, the operating room and the wards looked clean and functional. Over a delicious cup of 'estate tea' at the Senior M.O.'s bungalow, we talked about social aspects. Although the plantation workers, who are almost 100% Tamil, have regular employment their social habits have not improved. The management has provided them with latrines but these are not used. If they are, they are not kept clean or in working order, nor is sufficient water used, to make the waterseal efficient where this type of latrine is provided, and they become breeding grounds for germs. Patients who are treated at the hospital for deficiency diseases and intestinal infestations return six months after discharge in exactly the same condition as when they were first admitted. Worms and anaemia add to the general picture of debility among the labourers. I remembered what I had seen with my own eyes in the villages. One only had to watch the squatting rows of children in the morning and at night and at any hour in between to realise that not one of them passes a normal stool. Most of the food intake is passed through the system without proper absorption, and does no more good than pouring water into a barrel with a hole in it.

Trench latrines too are a health hazard. Whether or not sand is used for covering up excreta large ants crawl constantly in and out of the latrines and from there into the villagers' huts, across the eating space and kitchen floors. Flies are not the only menace.

Not long ago an article appeared in the daily press referring to the danger of using nightsoil as manure for certain vegetables, and bearing out the need for a wide study on the subject. I was

thinking of the manure pits in the Batlagundu block in which nightsoil was collected.

Our conversation could only touch on the problem of social education and the need for intensive training among rural and urban communities, as well as on family planning. But what I was told confirmed my own observations and concerns, which were general and not only confined to Tamilnad.

On our way back we called on the British Estate Manager. His large and beautiful bungalow overlooked a magnificent panorama, and was set in a huge garden filled with English flowers and shrubs in full bloom. To walk into the splendour of its interior, recline in soft, deeply upholstered armchairs, and gaze at paintings and walls lined with books, while sipping a cool drink, had an impact of dreamlike quality after the harsh realities of life at Batlagundu.

I did not return to Batlagundu but caught a crowded bus from Peermade to Madurai, an eight hour journey. All too soon the cool mountain air was replaced by heat as we descended into the plains, and when I reached Madurai I felt dirty, tired and hungry. I had a refreshing wash at the station and a pleasant meal at the very good station restaurant. Then I sat in a comfortable wicker chair on the upper verandah and relaxed with a newspaper and a crossword puzzle until my train was due to leave in the evening. This hour or two in my own company did wonders, at least temporarily. I pushed Gramdan and all that it entailed to the back of my mind, and relaxed physically and mentally. But moments like these never lasted. The problems and difficulties, alternating with high expectations and confidence in ultimate success, were for ever with me and reflected in my moods. I felt myself slipping into subjectivity. I was getting involved to an extent which left me exhausted. But I knew it and I could fight it, and gradually my days in Tamilnad crystallised into several aspects.

I realised that there was no uniform pattern to the understanding of Gramdan principles on an all-India scale. The detailed requirements for a village to be declared 'Gramdan' as laid down by Vinoba under 'Sulabha Gramdan', (Gramdan made easy), and set out in numerous leaflets and Sarvodaya literature, do not apply in all cases.

There is here, as in other areas, a difference of opinion regarding the collecting of new Gramdanas as against the consolidation of constructive work in existing Gramdan villages. There is an attitude, openly stated and encountered on several occasions, that only the Sarvodaya workers in Tamilnad, and no one else, would decide what was Gramdan and what was not. No one would dictate to them how to go about their work. It seems there is as strong an anti-North India feeling among Sarvodaya workers in the South, and this applies to Kerala too, as among the general public and politicians.

Another aspect is concerned with the constructive work, and pin-pointed by Shri Avaiyan's cryptic remark: We call it Gramdan for our purpose. For this is the dilemma. Should they wait until the villagers have been 'persuaded' to implement fully the necessary requirements for a declaration of Gramdan, or should they compromise? Shri Avaiyan is entirely honest about this difficulty and does not always agree with Shri Jaganathan on procedure. A further complication is the personality of Dick Keithahn who through many years of social work in the district has maintained a strong influence, giving guidance and support. At the same time, in spite of his own humility, he still holds a position of authority. 'Keithahnji says', is an often repeated phrase. He takes responsibility for decisions which are not always to the liking of the villagers, so that he acts in the double role of adviser and mentor on the one hand and as scapegoat on the other. He lives for his villagers and looks at them and at life around him through spectacles that are as rosy as his complexion.

Thousands of rupees in foreign aid have been poured into the area to help the Gramdanis, mainly the weaker section of society. They have come to expect continued outside help. Although Gramdanis, represented by their presidents, are drawn into consultation as members of the 'Gram Rajya Nirman Sangh' Executive Committee, much of the leadership and incentive is left in the hands of the chief workers. The Nirman Office at Batlagundu reminds one of a block office with villagers continuously calling for advice and discussion of their problems.

Shri Avaiyan agrees that far too much 'spoon-feeding' has



gone on, and continues to go on, in the Batlagundu Block. He hopes to avoid making the same mistake in the Usilampatti Block where intensive work is being taken up in conjunction with the CORAGS well programme.

There can be no doubt about progress in the villages; what is not certain is that the villagers have benefited uniformly. Large amounts of money were spent on the clearance of debts, to safe-guard mortgaged and encumbered land from falling into the hands of money-lenders. This benefited individual land-owners, and the landless had no share in it. Their often expressed statements that they are no better off support this view.

The failure of communal farming indicates a lack of concerted effort and underlines the individualistic trend which is still so strongly apparent.

The CORAGS well programme—excellent in concept—seems to have been started without sufficient detailed planning and phasing, and has run into difficulties creating tensions and new problems. Some of the vast stretches of wasteland to be reclaimed cover hill and forest areas. Many of the hills are bare, all growth having been cut down over the decades. The remaining forests are being ruthlessly exploited. The forest department staff are open to bribery, and do not enforce penalties. Every day one sees women and children carrying loads of firewood on their heads into Batlagundu to be sold for cash, and in the evenings the hills are ablaze with fires lit by villagers to clear sites. Much of the recent drought conditions are due to forest devastation. Can the programme of afforestation planned by the Nirman office escape renewed destruction unless there is a closer liaison with the Forest Department?

In many Gramdan villages schools, community halls, safe drinking water wells and public latrines have been built by free labour and government funds, benefiting Gramdanis and non-Gramdanis alike.

Shri Avaiyan has a band of devoted persons helping him in his tremendous task, who apply themselves to the work without sparing themselves. Many of them lack adequate training and often sufficient intelligence to bring about a more effective social and economic change. Enthusiasm and loyalty are not enough. The workers are not only underpaid but often do not receive

their salaries from the Khadi Commission for three months or more, and have to take up loans to feed their families. Personal hardship and worries are not conducive to good work.

Therefore the plan to set up workers' homesteads in each block is an imaginative step in the right direction. These will make the workers financially independent by including small holdings and workshops. But unless the workers themselves know how to create such small pilot projects and adopt methods and practices of an advanced technical and sanitary standard, a most valuable opportunity will be lost of stimulating the villagers to copy them.

The various village industries, where they have not failed, are on the whole only limping along, giving employment to a limited number of people.

I discussed my impressions at length with Shri Avaiyan and they did not contradict his own assessment. I quote from his report:

"... But we must see that the help done lasts forever; does not make him (the villager) careless, lazy, irresponsible, selfish and so on. Instead we must see that it develops all the required good qualities on the part of the individual and the village as a whole.

... To make clear:

(i) Nirman work should be started soon after the village has declared Gramdan;

(ii) Nirman should begin with the organisation of the village council, which is the collective democratic force of the village, the strength of which is mightier than any other village organisation that can be created;

(iii) Any amount of financial help would not help the villagers stand on their own legs. The help should be utilised for such works, which have a permanent value and contribute to the collective good of the community, undertaken voluntarily by the members of the village council and executed with a spirit of conscious co-operation and good-will;

(iv) Unless the problem of the landless is solved, and everybody is assured of their means of livelihood, it would be difficult to bring the village to the door of better living, let alone prosperity;

(v) All the foregone conditions may be there, and yet the ideal of Gram-Swaraj may be a far cry, if the workers are not of the proper mettle. . . .”

I felt despondent and depressed when I left Batlagundu. The glowing reports which I had read glossed over too many facts, presenting half truths. Yet it would be irresponsible to minimise results, for in the face of great obstacles much had been achieved.

But logic and reason do not always help. As in Maharashtra I had set my sights too high, and for the next few weeks I struggled to regain some measure of perspective which would give me back the necessary objectivity.

At the end of my brief tour of Tinneveli I went on to Kanya Kumari, the very tip of India. For to have come this far south without doing so would have been like visiting Agra for the first time and not seeing the Taj Mahal. I reached Kanya Kumari in the evening and stood on the beach, conscious that with one more step I would be walking off the huge landmass that is Europe and Asia at the very point where the waters of three oceans mingle. Behind me, spreading north, east and west, were the massive continents, before me the vastness of the seas and, above, the limitless sky. I could have watched the sun rising out of the waves to the east and sink again into the ocean to the west without moving.

Krishnān Nair and I stayed for 24 hours before boarding a bus for Trivandrum. The sun had just set and the Western Ghats were mere outlines against a moonlit sky. We travelled fast and were soon in Kerala. Every few yards a lighted cottage sprang into view on either side of the road, every few miles another bazaar, a township, teeming with life. We reached Trivandrum at ten o'clock. An argument arose with the coolie who was to carry my bag to the railway retiring rooms. 'Relations with labourers are strained now-a-days,' said Krishnan Nair. 'They demand and demand, and the slightest incident could flare up into open hostility and a brawl'.

I knew Kerala would be different. how different became immediately apparent; the general cleanliness which surrounded me, the appearance of neatly groomed men, women and children dressed in spotlessly white garments everywhere among the crowd,—they were the crowd. Kerala with its unique geographical position, its varied history and its highly literate,

keenly intellectual people, bursts upon one with a vigorous energy only matched by its troubles and frustrations.

In the morning we drove by car to Malayadi, one of the few Gramdan areas within easy reach of Trivandrum. Here, in Kerala, villages in the accepted sense do not exist. Houses and cottages stand in their own minute plot of land, and are grouped as villages merely for revenue purposes. Each little holding is shaded by coconut trees, tapioca grows in every little garden, and all kinds of vegetation sprout in profusion.

Perhaps it was for reasons of centralisation that rightly or wrongly the setting up of an institution was thought a necessity. Somewhere there had to be a focal point from which constructive work could make a beginning. So in 1954 the Sarvodaya workers in Trivandrum founded Vinoba Niketan. In order to facilitate development various organisations were set up, such as the Sarvodaya Service Co-operative Society, the Gramdan Co-operative Society and a 'Samadha Sangham', consisting of 101 members who were drawn from among the villagers. Intensified agriculture, cleaning up of villages and the construction of roads began. Disputes were settled without being taken to court for litigation.

An upper primary school was started, attended now by 433 pupils. There is today a nursery school catering for 35 children and a creche for babies of women labourers, and 12 children are given training in a craft centre. At the Khadi Centre 35 women are spinning on six-spindle spinning wheels and 15 handlooms are operating.

The Sarvodaya Service Co-operative Society was set up to give debt relief and to facilitate agricultural development. The Trivandrum District Co-operative Bank advanced a loan, and gave overdraft facilities. Deposits were collected from various sources. The society operates seven ration depots, a provision store and a manure depot. The administration is in the hands of an executive committee, and thirteen Gramdanis are employed full time. The Khadi and village industries and the village councils function through the Gramdan Co-operative Society.

The secretary of Vinoba Niketan had called a meeting of the village councils. Most of the staff of the institute come from these Gramdan villages and in appearance there was little to

single them out from the villagers, who mostly wore white Khadi and looked scrupulously clean.

The president of the Keezhpaloon village council told us about his village of 48 families and 350 people who between them own no more than 26 acres of land. Paddy is grown on four acres, on the rest mainly tapioca and coconut palms. Some families own more land than others, the majority a mere fraction of an acre, a small garden almost, in which stands their humble home. A few families received small plots by distribution.

The village joined Gramdan in 1958 'to fulfil the great Gandhian ideal for a new society based on love and non-violence, seeking to establish freedom from exploitation and village self-sufficiency. The fruits of shared labour should be available to all. But how can this be achieved when most of them are landless labourers and when there is no land to distribute?' he asked. Those who own land and produce crops used to be exploited by the middleman. The president didn't think they had achieved much. They tried to improve their agricultural practices. They took up loans from the Co-operative Union Bank to redeem mortgaged land. Indebtedness has ceased. Debts amounting to Rs. 20,000 have been cleared, only Rs. 3000 are left to be repaid. These debts were caused by pledging crops in advance to money-landers. They are today able to make a bare living from their land and from wages earned as labourers. Their greatest asset is the fair-price provision store, set up with funds from War-on-Want and run by the village council which takes all profits. A resolution has been taken recently to collect regular contributions for the village Fund. A Women's Society is functioning and the women meet once a week. They discuss the problems of different families and undertake family visiting. They are concerned with sanitation and cleaning up of the village, and attend to the latrines which they try to introduce into every house.

A primary health centre and maternity centre is only three furlongs away but its facilities are not adequate. Gramdan has not achieved much economic change, any improvement is swallowed up by the rise in prices. There has admittedly been social change, their standard of living has risen. They have

more vessels and utensils in their homes. But there is no way by which they could progress further. Land, the basis for development on Gramdan lines, is non-existent. Earnings through Khadi or village industry are marginal, benefiting only a limited number of persons.

Conditions at Thachancode are more favourable. The forty families constituting the village council cultivate eight acres of paddy land and 68 acres of orchard land, mainly coconuts. War-on-Want funds helped with agricultural development. The use of improved methods of cultivation, improved seeds and manure trebled the paddy crop. The crop from garden lands also increased with manuring. The villagers have benefited and are eating better today than before the declaration of Gramdan. At the same time they are facing obstructive practices from the government which hinder further development.

Other villages benefited likewise but also faced the same obstacles.

The main issue which emerged from our detailed discussion revolved round the difficulty of applying Gramdan principles in an area where land was so scarce that the basic policy of land distribution by the haves to the have-nots cannot operate. The problems here are akin to those found in urban areas where labour not land is the main source of income.

At Vinoba Niketan the villagers are involved in the activities to a far greater extent than I have observed in other institutions. This is of course helped by the high literacy rate of the community which facilitates easy communication and participation.

The school too is making a marked contribution. The villagers collected Rs. 40,000 towards the building. The teachers although government paid are selected by the staff of Vinoba Niketan. I was taken to the school hall where the children were assembled. A little undersized fellow of 12 years of age addressed the school parliament in his role of Prime Minister; and one of the Cabinet Ministers, another equally undersized little fellow, gave the vote of thanks at the end of our small function. The children were remarkably bright and uninhibited in asking questions. They looked clean and tidy. The headmaster, a man of imagination, told me that he taught his pupils citizenship and democratic principles through practical application. He

was obviously making a success of his experiment. But he also told me that many of the children were so hungry that a number of them fainted during classes.

I realised that in Kerala the clean and bright appearance of children and adults gives a false impression of sufficiency and blinds one to the real poverty. The Malayali will go without food rather than wear dirty clothes. He will buy a newspaper rather than a cup of coffee if he cannot afford both.

On our return to Trivandrum I was shown a few of the main attractions of the city, and in the evening I was asked to address a meeting at the Gandhi Memorial Trust to share some of my impressions of Gramdan with those who had come to listen. My talk was followed by another address on Gandhian principles given by Shri Dada Dharmadhikari without allowing questions on Gramdan first. At the close of Shri Dada's speech, which referred to the linguistic problem, any interest that I may have aroused was completely submerged by the topical issue of the three-language formula.

We left Trivandrum early next morning for Mayanur via Cochin where we stopped for lunch at the house of Krishnan Nair's relations. With typical Indian hospitality they made me feel part of the family. This brief visit gave me an opportunity of seeing inside one of the small, neat houses set in their tiny garden plots over-shadowed by coconut palms, and of watching women and children twisting coir into ropes on a simple wheel and pulley contraption.

From Cochin we took the train for Ottapalam. We had to cross a wide stream in order to reach the ashram. In the month of February most of the river-bed was dry sand except for some twenty yards of shallow water. We hitched up our clothes and waded knee-deep to the other side. Shri Nambisan of the Gandhi Ashram had come to meet us off the train and on arrival we were warmly greeted by his wife and children. The ashram and its institutional activities have been the life-work of this devoted couple, but not at the expense of a closely-knit family life. It was therefore easier to relax and gossip than keep one's mind alert and take notes of everything that was being discussed.

On the following day we walked to Nayamur Gramdan village. In actual fact it is neither Gramdan nor a village in the



accepted sense but a Bhoodan settlement having a village council of which Shri Nambisan is the President. I stopped now and then to talk to men and women. Koppan is a mason and carpenter, 60 years of age and unmarried. He comes from a village five miles away. He lived there with his brother and had enough work in the village and enough food for three meals daily. Why then did he apply to come here, I asked him. The settlement offered him more work and life was better here, he replied. How, I wanted to know. In his own village he had a joint house with his brother, here he has his own. Had his income increased? No, not to make any real difference. He didn't need much materially. Sufficient food and a life of prayer were all he asked for. Towards this end he took advice and guidance from a swami.

The woman Mackanbi is 46 years old and a 'Nair', (one of the upper castes in Kerala). She lost her husband two years ago and is left with six children. She and her family used to live in a village two or three miles away where her husband was the village musician. They had no land or home of their own, so they applied for a house here and moved in four years ago. Her eldest son is married and was given the house next door. He is employed in a chemist's shop at Ottapallam and earns Rs. 2.50 a day. The woman is literate and all her children go to school. She used to do a little work in exchange for paddy but is not working any longer. The family have two meals most days, occasionally there is only enough for one meal. She grows tapioca, pulses and bananas on her piece of land which she works with her children. She attends the village council meetings regularly once a month when the domestic affairs of the settlement are being discussed. She belonged to the Women's Society which used to meet two or three times a year but is no longer functioning. I asked her what she wanted for her children's future, to which she replied: whatever you like to give!

Ammu belongs to a backward community and is 40 years of age. She is small and has a deformed leg but a delightfully happy and pleasant face. She comes from Trichur, 30 miles away. She learned about the settlement from her husband who is employed at the aghram as a bullock driver. She decided to join him and now has a house of her own. She and her children

also work at the ashram. I wanted to know if her outlook on life had changed since she came here. 'We have a feeling of oneness', she replied. She too was a member of the defunct women's society. Her eldest daughter is married and has another house in the settlement.

The teacher conducts only nursery classes. The children are taught literacy, dancing and games and are given a snack. She lives in her own village, adjacent to the settlement. She would not like to live here and share the community life, for she comes from a middle class home where she is comfortable. In her village too there is a feeling of oneness, she said, and she cannot see any reason for making a change.

The village council meeting in the evening was disappointing. Although there was this supposed feeling of oneness, a means of settling differences among themselves, a ration shop and other facilities to make their life easier, a true sense of self-development was lacking. The people admitted that they had made no contribution themselves but were merely enjoying this 'better way of life'.

How can it be otherwise? The houses were built on Bhoodan land and only after completion were the families selected. The leadership quite obviously is in the hands of Shri Nambisan, the president of the village council. Even now another Bhoodan settlement is under construction and again the people are being selected after completion. This method must cut right across any policy of self-help. Any change of policy would necessitate a dismantling of many of the ashram activities which at the moment give employment to a number of villagers in the various traditional village industries. Can the Nambisans be expected to undo their life's work, built up over many years of selfless labour, in order to undertake intensive village development on Gramdan lines?

There cannot be two more unlike characters than Shri Nambisan and Shri Radhakrishna Menon of the Seva Mandir Danagram, the Danagram Service Society in the district of Calicut. The one quiet and deliberate, a stocky, solidly built man, the other bursting into the peace of the Gandhi Ashram on the following morning like a whirlwind, a slim tall man as quick of movement as of mind, with an abounding energy which

swept me along at a breathless pace for the next few days. He had a delightful way of watching over me by constantly calling out 'have a care, take a care', in case I stumbled or toppled out of the jeep.

The first lap of our trip took us to the Rural Institute at Tavanur in the Palghat district which is affiliated to the National Council for Rural Higher Education in New Delhi. Although the Institute is in no way connected with the Gramdan ideology in spite of the fact that Shri Kelappan, the veteran Sarvodaya leader in Kerala, is its vice-chairman, I was glad of the opportunity to compare its policy with that of Agrindus, the Institute founded under Sarva Seva Sangh and War-on-Want auspices.

The Institute aims at providing higher education to rural youths in a rural setting in an attempt to 'inculcate in them a spirit of service to the community and sympathy for the rural way of life'. It is meant to produce men and women of broad vision, capable of providing responsible and progressive leadership in specialised spheres of rural services.

The Institute came into being in 1963 and is government sponsored. The prospectus states that all members of the community are expected to wear Khadi, but thinking back I do not remember seeing any evidence of this.

Several courses are offered. A preparatory course of two years duration, equivalent to the pre-degree course of the Kerala University, is compulsory for admission to the three year course in Rural Services. The Sanitary Inspectors' training course of twelve months is open to 17-year-old boys who have passed the secondary school leaving certificates. The diploma course of civil engineering is of three years' duration, and the certificate course in agriculture for two years is open to matriculates and geared towards the training of extension officers, farm supervisors and employment in agricultural government offices and research institutions.

I met the assembled students to talk to them about Gramdan. Question time followed. None of the students were very well informed about Gramdan or particularly interested. Their main questions hinged on their concern for their own future and chance of employment. What is the good of studying when there is no job at the end of it? The girls too didn't know how

to fit their qualifications into a working life.

About two weeks later I met another group of students, this time from a similar institute at Gandhigram in Tamilnad. Their questions to me were identical. Neither in Kerala nor in Tamilnad had it occurred to any of the boys to apply their knowledge in furthering development in their own villages. They would rather join the ranks of the unemployed graduates waiting for a government job than use their skill and energy to do some good where it is most needed. We talked about this at some length and I can only hope that a seed has been sown among one or two boys. It is sad to think that these young people asked me, an outsider and a foreigner, for advice about their future; to find that the staff members had not the imagination and vision to direct their students back into work which is so desperately needed, namely village leadership and applied new methods and techniques developed from within instead of being government introduced from outside. The staff are keen to teach and research in their own subjects, doubtlessly doing a fine job as became apparent when I was shown over the dairy, the poultry unit, the plantations and fields. Unfortunately I had met the staff prior to meeting the students and had no chance to talk with them again.

In any case, as happened on several occasions in Kerala, the discussion with the staff turned to politics, a subject I tried to avoid for obvious reasons. Another small incident which I found revealing as well as in bad taste happened during the principal's introduction of staff members. He referred to one of his lectures as being a Harijan and yet a member of the staff!

We left Tavanur in the early afternoon and headed towards Nilambur where 1000 acres of forest land on the slopes of the Western Ghats had been donated in Bhoodan in 1954. The distribution ceremony was performed by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, but there was no follow-up until constructive work began in 1960 under the direction of Shri E. Ikkanda Warriar.

The Nilambur Sarvodaya Gramdan Co-operative Society was formed and soil conservation began under a government loan scheme. Various aid programmes helped with the construction of houses. The Khadi Board assisted with village industries, mainly Khadi and hand-pounding of paddy and

setting up of a village store. About 400 acres of land were distributed among 140 families. Through lack of effective local leadership neither the society nor the village council functioned properly. Possibly easy economic development undermined cohesive and co-operative efforts. The community gained material advantages without the necessary social education. Corruption and drunkenness, quarrels and fighting hindered any further constructive efforts by Shri Raja, a senior Sarvodaya Social worker. Disheartened and disillusioned he turned his back on them and gave his attention to the adjoining 400 acres. There he began constructive work in 1963, determined not to commit the same mistakes. He formed a village council of the 65 families settled there and called the village Shantigram (village of peace). He refused to register a co-operative society officially and refrained from taking any government loans.

Our journey by jeep took us through miles of jungle-like forest where twenty years ago wild animals roamed with no human habitation. Today there are numerous small bazaars lining the jungle-track, and people have penetrated the forest and settled in clearings of different sizes. Nilambur is no longer deserted. More and more families have come, mostly from the nearby coastal area, but also from as far afield as the Travancore and Cochin districts. These 'southern settlers' being relatively more educated and sophisticated frequently create bad feelings and difficulties among the more backward community which they joined.

It was dark long before we reached our destination. Men awaited us among the trees with lanterns and flares. They had come from Shantigram across a mountain stream. Now they picked up our bags and led us down to the river. By the light of the hurricane lamps and with the aid of helping hands I was guided across rocks and through the shallow water of the stream, stepping from stone to stone, then up another narrow track until we reached a plateau and a couple of buildings—all that I could see of the village. We had arrived.

While waiting for a simple meal to be prepared a staff member from the Rural Institute at Tavanur who had accompanied us drew me into a political discussion about the rights and wrongs of the 1965 Indo-Pak hostilities. His stand was so

blatantly pro-Russian and anti-British and American that he goaded me into remonstrating with him. 'How would you feel' he exclaimed, 'if American tanks from Pakistan were killing your own people?' It had been a long and tiring day and I could feel myself getting angry in the face of his intolerance and uninformed judgment. I got up rather rudely and joined the others who had left us to ourselves. It was an unfortunate incident for later in Calicut I found out that he had asked Radhakrishna Menon if the Sarva Seva Sangh had pro-Pakistan leanings! I hastened to put matters right by explaining what had happened, repeating the trend of our talk.

I slept in a small hut vacated for me by Shri Raja while the men dosed down in the larger building. Next morning we walked through the village and the reclaimed fields. I was shown the newly constructed dam and the way the water was channelled from one terraced field to the next. Funds from War-on-Want had helped with this irrigation scheme. War-on-Want funds had also helped with the construction of the village community centre where we were holding a meeting with members of the village council, representing a mixed community of Hindus and Muslims.

V. Mohamed is a bidi worker (bidi, the local unpapered cigarette) who lived formerly at a place some twenty miles away. He used to earn Rs. 1.25 per day. On one day each week he had no work. He married in 1958 and now has five children. When land was distributed here he received two acres. With aid from the Sarvodaya office, allocated to him by the village council, he thatched his house and bought implements and seed to cultivate his land. Today he has an income of Rs. 120 a month in kind and cash, which is about sufficient to keep him and his family. They eat three meals daily; in the morning tea, tapioca or rice, and dosa, a rice pancake; at noon, liquid rice and at night time rice with curried vegetables and fish from the river. He also keeps chickens. His aim is to bring up his children properly. When their needs are met he will donate any surplus to the village community.

Another man, an adivasi (tribal) of the Prangodan Hill tribe, lived 50 miles away on a plot of land belonging to the local Raia's family. He worked as an agricultural labourer earning

Rs. 1.25 per day, on which to keep a wife and six children. In 1963 he came to Shantigram and because of his large family was given six acres of land. He has retained two acres for himself, giving him an average of Rs. 2 per day in cash and kind, and has distributed the rest of his land among his sons. He also works on the communal village land and receives Rs. 3.50 per day for his labour.

T. Sreedharan Nair is 40 years of age. He lived twenty miles away and was a trained teacher. His wife is also a teacher. They earned Rs. 300 a month between them. When he got interested in Sarvodaya ideals, he gave up his job and in 1961 came to Shantigram. His wife followed a year later. He was allocated four acres of land, and makes an average of Rs. 1000 a year from agriculture. His wife teaches at the school in the next village and earns Rs. 175 per month. They have five children. Financially they are little better off but they are happier and content, and have never regretted taking this step.

The village council seems to be functioning well. There is no women's society nor any kind of women's programme. A village fund and village store were established in 1963. It is a rule that everybody must contribute eight days' worth of income to the village fund or a minimum of roughly Rs. 2.50. Those who cannot make a financial contribution give their labour instead.

The men told me that at Shantigram the village council has the ultimate authority, not Vinobaji, and this authority is based on Sarvodaya principles. The village store is stocked by individual contributions. Sarvodaya patra (collection of a small daily portion of grain) is practised in every house and everybody gives shramdan (free labour) on the fifteen acres under common cultivation once a week. The paddy harvest goes to the village store, any cash profits from tapioca and bananas go towards managerial expenses of the village council. Out of an annual income of Rs. 2,500 Rs. 100 are given to the two families who supervise the communal cultivation. Other amounts cover travelling expenses to Calicut and markets.

Outsiders are impressed by the development at Shantigram. People come and ask for loans from the village council on the security of their crops and are given these free of interest. Honest transactions leave their mark and villagers are talking

about Gramdan and discuss the possibility of joining the movement.

We said good-bye to the people of Shantigram and walked the mile or two to the village still known by the name of Gramdan Co-operative Society. When we reached the borderline between the two villages all Raja's bitterness expressed itself in his comments. Fields and village looked prosperous, but when Raja had left them the villagers had lost all remnants of confidence in one another. Many of the villagers were 'southerners'. These had been joined by trespassers and squatters during the period of no follow-up work, when they penetrated and infiltrated the dense forest lands. Due to the earlier development and constructive work under Raja's guidance the villagers achieved economic improvement but they are an unhappy lot. Much bickering goes on between different political groups. All sense of unity has been lost. The co-operative society has been liquidated by the registrar. Strong village leadership is not forthcoming. The men complained that today all interest is focussed on Shantigram, no one from the Sarvodaya office at Calicut ever visits them. They have reformed the village council and are in a repentant mood. But without effective leadership they can get nowhere, they said. Now they need help.

As we left the meeting the men surrounded Radhakrishna. 'You have neglected us too,' they accused him. 'You have not come to see us for several years'. 'It is your own fault', he replied. 'How many children have you?' they asked him. 'Six', he said. 'And if one of your children goes astray will you abandon him?' they questioned. 'You have abandoned us. We need your help and guidance. We have realised our mistake. We need you now more than ever.'

It was a thoughtful and perplexed Radhakrishna who joined us at the jeep. He had his own work, how could he find time to save these lost sheep? Yet they had challenged him in a way he could not ignore. Someone, if not he, will have to be found to help rebuild what the people themselves have destroyed.

By the time we left the Nilambur area it was mid-morning and the sun was hot and fierce when we reached Navodaya Danagram at Puthukode in the Cherukave Panchayat, not far



from Calicut. This was Radhakrishna Menon's Gramdan village of 30 families settled on 60 acres of Bhoodan land. The village straggled up a hillside and the new road is still partially under construction. After climbing the last furlong or so in the afternoon heat Mrs. Menon's warm welcome and kind hospitality soon dispelled all tiredness, and after some rest I was ready to listen to the history of this project and to be shown the village.

Navodaya Danagram came into being in 1958-59 and at that time, although situated only two miles from the main Calicut-Madras trunk road, was inaccessible except by foot until at the initiative of the Gramdan community road construction began with free labour and donations. No one would have selected such a site by choice. Only the determination of a close-knit society could have transformed this waste-land into productive fields and created an orderly village and a homogeneous community.

The community includes twenty Harijan families, six Nairs, one weaver and three Thiyyas (one of the scheduled castes). Under the Harijan house construction and settlement scheme 21 houses were built with government funds supplemented by free labour and further funds from War-on-Want. The remaining families still live in kutchu huts. The villagers have dug five wells and one tank for irrigation and domestic purposes with funds from various indigenous organisations. Perhaps the most progressive feature in environmental sanitation are the three common bath-rooms and common latrines constructed with further funds from War-on-Want.

Basic education, social change and economic development are the cornerstones on which Navodaya Danagram was built. It is here that Radhakrishna and Nirmala Menon's talents have found full play. Basic education at Ramanatkara, a nursery school, an upper primary basic school, a post-basic high school of which Radhakrishna is the headmaster, and a secondary grade teachers' training college, operate within a two mile radius of every house at Danagram. Together with women's and children's welfare work they are the basis from which a new society is growing.

A scheme of soil conservation was worked out as a centrally

aided programme on a 75% loan basis on 36 acres of land. Radhakrishna took me to the teachers' training college built on the crown of the hill. We looked down on an area of a thousand acres selected by the government as a demonstration area for soil conservation following the successful implementation of his own programme. Around the building the ground is terraced. 'We shall plant trees here to hold the soil and to give shade, we shall do this and we shall do that, we have only just begun', he told me. Villagers, students and teachers are all involved. Agricultural development has been difficult and laborious. Since 1963 a joint farming co-operative society has been functioning. A women's co-operative society is engaged in mat-weaving, and in printing and dyeing of cloth. Further activities in agriculture, husbandry and industry are being planned by the village council.

My time at Danagram was far too short. But I talked to the young men undergoing teachers' training. They agreed that the linguistic agitation by students was a symptom rather than the cause of their unrest, which they said was largely due to a sense of insecurity. They too claimed that they had no jobs to go to after completion of their studies, a statement I found hard to believe when I have so often been told of the shortage of teachers. I also talked to the principal. He lives in a nearby village where he owns a few acres. He is sympathetic to Gramdan and fully supports the movement and its ideology, but finds it impossible to give up the security of holding the title deeds of his land himself, by donating it to the community and joining Gramdan. He is faced with a constant inner struggle, aware of his shortcomings, yet for the time being unable to take this last step. His influence on the students, and on their life among the Gramdanis in a Gramdan village, is sure to make an impact on them and ought to influence their future attitude as teachers.

I met a delightful young couple. They have been married for about two years. The husband, instead of taking his bride to his own village as would have been customary, preferred to come to Danagram and join his bride, and work as a stone cutter.

The Menons are the servants of the community. They live

at a standard no better and no worse than the rest. They have no more and no less and share on an entirely equal basis all the available facilities, be it housing, common bathrooms, latrines or land. Radhakrishna, a brilliant teacher and warm-hearted family man, brings an intellectual and humane approach to the many problems facing them all. His restless energy knows no limits and is reflected in the people in whom it is strangely mixed with a quiet discipline and a pride in achievement in the face of great obstacles.

At Danagram new values are growing out of old traditions, material gains are bringing incentive for further development, education is stimulating minds in living a full and creative life. Would that there were thousands more such villages in Kerala!

The following morning we left for Calicut. We paid a short visit to Shri Kelappan with whom I was to stay the following night. In Calicut I received hospitality in Shri Shamji's delightful home. To my consternation another public meeting had been arranged for me at the as yet uncompleted new Gandhi building. To add to my nervousness two reporters of the two main Malayali newspapers questioned me immediately on arrival, and not only that but a representative of All India Radio taped my talk. As it turned out the reports in the newspapers were very well written and surprisingly accurate. Questions following talks are always intriguing. They are either simple and easy to answer or quite impossible. In Calicut I was asked: Why do people join the communist party rather than Gramdan? What answer could I give? And then as so often in moments when one is completely unprepared the answer came to me spontaneously. I said: It is easier for people to join communism, for action and personal involvement lies in the future—there is no need to change now. All is hope and promise to be fulfilled when the party comes to power one day. Gramdan demands action, a change of attitude now, at the moment of joining. Membership is not enough. Gramdan asks for the whole of man. He must act himself and not leave action to others. This too was quoted in the papers.

After the meeting we strolled along the seashore where Vasco da Gama landed in 1498. The heat of the day had given way to a gentle breeze. Waves lapped lazily across the sands.

small fishing boats and ships swayed on the tide. I forgot people, reporters, questions and ideologies. I relaxed.

Early next morning saw us again on the road. We were heading north towards the Cannanore district and drove for many miles along the seashore and around small palm-lined bays, reminiscent of the south of France. Tellecherry with its French names still in evidence, such as 'Ecole de Filles', added to the illusion. Eventually we turned inland to reach Nethaji Danagram about noon. We walked to the ancient irrigation tank which had fallen into disuse over the decades. Men and women were busily engaged on reconstruction work, most of them being Gramdanis, but a few outsiders are also employed.

In 1952, 905 acres were given in Bhoodan by Samuel Aron, a prominent Congress freedom fighter in a nearby town. A few families moved on to the land during the past fifteen years. but the majority of 25 families, now joined in Gramdan, were settled over the past two years. All of them had been landless and had come from nearby villages, receiving two to three acres of land according to need. This land was then donated in Gramdan. Eight acres were set aside as common land. The village council was formed in 1967 and has an executive of seven members. From the day of its inception a minute book has been kept recording every meeting held since that date.

For instance: On the 15th July 1967 the following resolutions were arrived at: That funds from War-on-Want should be spent on 1) Rs. 1,000 for tank reconstruction; 2) Rs. 750 to be set aside for the construction of irrigation canals; 3) Rs. 1,000 to be spent on a village council office and community building and on the cultivation of the common land; 4) Rs. 1,200 to be spent on further house constructions; 5) As this was the rainy season and work could not proceed for the time being it was further decided to issue small loans to individual members for agricultural development purposes, amounts not to exceed Rs. 50. (Most of these loans have been repaid by now, February 1968). 6) It was also decided that the chairman and secretary should jointly operate a bank account with the Syndicate Bank in the nearby town; 7) The tank reconstruction, eight acres of common land and four acres of cashewnut and orchard plantation around the village council building to be worked by

the Gramdanis; 8) Further money to be spent on a nursery school.

The above mentioned loans to individual village council members were given at  $7\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest to be paid back into the village fund. The loans were issued against stamped documents. Both president and secretary are Harijans and literate, elected by a mixed community. In all, thirty men and women are literate and all twenty school age children go to school at a distance of one mile. Half of them are girls. The Gramdanis have close contact with the block office.

The village council office and community centre is a simple structure with a low and sloping thatched roof giving maximum shade and coolness. It also contains the village store and functions as a common kitchen.

- I saw the fields stocked with tapioca, banana trees, coconut palms, jack-fruit trees and mango trees, chillies, and other plants, and I visited one or two of the newly built houses in the charming setting of their own small plots of orchard land.

- The jeep which was to take us to another Gramdan village, Kattanapalli, re-named Vinoba Danagram, was delayed and picked us up too late to get there. Regretfully therefore we had to return to reach Kelappanji's village house before nightfall. Even so it was already dark when we left the jeep to walk across the fields by the light of lanterns. Kelappanji rarely stays at his ancestral home for any length of time but travels from project to project in pursuit of Sarvodaya work. Now an indefatigable old man he is one of the veteran freedom fighters dedicated to social uplift and the rehabilitation of the backward classes. During the Guruvayar 1931/32 Satyagraha for the eradication of untouchability Kelappanji led the people and political workers who had converged on Guruvayar from all over India. When after ten months the temple gates remained closed he entered on an indefinite fast and only gave this up at Gandhi's advice. Although the Satyagraha did not immediately achieve its object it helped to create the climate in favour of eradication of untouchability.

My packed schedule gave me no chance of talking to Kelappanji at length, for the next morning saw us again on the move. We walked for a mile or so to 'Kelappanji Danagram : a village

as yet in the making. Kelappanji had donated 35 acres of land in 1955. Of this 18 acres were distributed to 35 families, each receiving some half acre. The remainder, mainly rocky hill land, is to be used for communal cultivation. Work only began in 1967. A well is being dug with government aid, the scientific cultivation of cashewnuts explored with the help of the Horticultural Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Already families have started planting cashewnut and mango trees, jack fruit and tapioca. But for the present the community of mixed castes earns its livelihood by working as labourers. The richness of the surrounding fields gives an indication of the prospects of future development, although most of the Gramdan land is on hilly slopes. So far two families have constructed houses on their half acre plots.

We walked on to another village, Muchukunno, where 35 acres of land were donated by Kelappanji's sister in 1956. On the hill top 14 houses have been constructed with aid from the Harijan Welfare Department of Rs. 500 towards the cost of Rs. 1,000 per house built with free labour. Five more houses were built under the government settlement scheme for non-Harijans. The buildings form a line on either side of a large area covered with sand and grass. The appearance of the colony is perhaps functional but does not present a picture of harmony or charm of a kind I had come to expect in Kerala. The open space could be laid out into an orchard or garden, but who would invest money in such a scheme for the sake of beauty? The village council was formed last year, 1967, and all land is held by it. A community hall was built at the time of the house construction and a nursery school started. The Sarvodaya office at Calicut pays for the teacher in charge. The children's snack meal is provided by the village council. The block office made a recent grant towards renovating the houses. Incidentally, the people themselves are not too happy about the way their houses have been grouped or rather lined up because it marks the colony as a Harijan settlement.

One has the feeling that both these villages are still very much at the beginning and much effort will have to go into future development if they are to succeed on self-help and Gramdan lines. But then Kelappanji interprets Sarvodaya in

his own way, adapting Gramdan principles to a greater-or lesser degree.

With this last visit my days in Kerala came to an end. We returned once more to Kelappanji's lovely home for an early lunch, then walked to the road from where a jeep took us back to Calicut. There I caught a train for Coimbatore and Madurai, left to myself and to my own thoughts for the first time in three weeks.

The sudden release of pressure on my mental reserves acted on me like a physical shock. There was no gradual relaxing, no slow easing of tension but a sudden dropping of chains, a lifting of spirits. I felt irrationally happy and content. For a few hours at least I had no need to try and communicate, to read minds, reactions or simply understand words, sentences and situations. How much this had to do with the fact that for once I was travelling first class instead of third I don't know. What I do realise now is the reason for the colossal strain I felt on these tours. The difficulty in communication was only partially responsible. Much more significant was my own attitude. I was trying to reach an honest assessment of Gramdan on all levels. This was for me not merely a question whether funds from War-on-Want had produced wells, bought bullocks or agricultural implements in a village I was told had declared Gramdan. For me this had become a pilgrimage, a search for truth. I was not prepared to accept the 'dogma and creed' of Gramdan unquestioningly. I had to get to the truth in all circumstances, and this my companions rarely allowed me to do. My probing questions, so different from those usually posed by visitors, put them invariably on the defensive, at times even caused resentment. I often felt like an agnostic wrestling with the faithful, half convinced and half in doubt.

And Kerala had been no exception. What had concerned me most was the absence of any co-ordinated or concerted efforts and the small number of Gramdan villages, none of them recently declared. But then Kerala was different.

It would need an extensive study to explain and understand the difference of Kerala in the setting of the Indian sub-continent, particularly as many of the historical events and their repercussions have their counterparts in other regions. Never-

theless there can be no doubt that Kerala's geographical position has influenced her development. It may be argued that the emergence of a new social order in the 19th and 20th centuries re-awakened latent trends which had lain dormant for centuries. It is certainly responsible for the widespread literacy and high social standards found everywhere. At the same time, density of population and scarcity of land, combined with growing political consciousness, are responsible for widespread unemployment, unrest and dissatisfaction with the government.

Gramdan with its declared 417 villages plays an insignificant role in Kerala. As far as I am aware only in the Trivandrum area have existing villages declared Gramdan. Elsewhere new settlements on Bhoodan land are being developed on Gramdan lines to a greater or lesser degree. It is surprising and disconcerting that there are so few Gramdans in Kerala, and discouraging that there is no uniform and cohesive programme. A strong individualistic approach characterises all Gramdan activities.

The 1966 report of the Gandhi Memorial Trust describes an extensive and widespread programme. At the annual conference of the Trust's workers in October 1966 a decision was taken that a joint effort should be made for reviving Gramdan work in the state, particularly in the Sasthamkotta block. What has happened towards implementing that decision? According to the Trust report there are nine centres functioning in as many districts, each having three sub-centres and covering a population of about 1½ lakhs. The seven-point programme touches all aspects of life: 1. More and better food; 2. better hygiene and health; 3. more basic and social education and better citizenship; 4. more village industries and better income; 5. better cultural and community life; 6. closer association with co-operatives and panchayats, and 7. building up a Shanti Sena for the maintenance of peace and for rendering social services. It is regrettable that I was given no opportunity to see any of the Trust's work. Any programme based on the above points should pave the way for people's participation and thereby Gramdan, and I was puzzled at the apparent lack of co-ordination between the Trust's and Gramdan activities. I wondered why there was not greater support for a vigorous Gramdan programme:

My visit to Vinoba Niketan and my talk with villagers and



staff clearly indicated the need for a programme which dealt with the fundamental difficulty of land scarcity and large-scale unemployment or partial employment of the highly literate rural and semi-urban population. Here particularly the emphasis on land distribution on which Gramdan is predominantly based ought to shift to a stronger policy of distribution of wealth, earnings and labour relations.

On our return from Ramanattukara to Calicut we encountered a troop of the newly formed Communist Sena, marching with precision and vigour, adorned in clean shorts and shirts draped with red sashes. This movement, with its divisive impact, could only be countered by strengthening and co-ordinating the programme of the Shanti Sena; and a recent meeting in Trivandrum had outlined steps towards this end.

The Muslim League too is very much in evidence. I was in the area during the preparation for the forthcoming convention of the League in Calicut. Every Muslim house and hut flew the green and white flag in almost unbroken line along village lanes and streets in and around Calicut.

Muslim women are easily recognizable, wearing long dark skirts, long sleeved blouses reaching high up to the neck with heads covered but not their faces. Little Muslim girls look charming with their gaily coloured wispy pieces of material pinned to their dark hair. It bestows on them a dignity absurd and out of keeping with their skipping feet, all that can be seen of their legs protruding from long swinging skirts. In contrast, Hindu women have no inhibition in exposing their upper bodies as has been customary among them since ancient times. But education among the young, and sophistication among the middle and upper classes, have caused a break with this tradition, and in towns and cities Hindu women dress mostly like their sisters in other parts of India.

In the Gramdan villages that I visited in the Nilambur and Cannanore districts communal harmony exists. But how far this can be said of other regions remains a moot question, it being generally alleged that the Muslims in Kerala represent a 'small Pakistan'. One cannot help but feel that with the slightest provocation communal and political disturbances could flare up in violent demonstrations.

Although I knew North India quite well I had only a fleeting acquaintance with the South before, and I was enjoying my experience of staying in some of the major cities; Madras, Madurai, Trivandrum, Cochin, Calicut, Coimbatore and now Bangalore. If I had to choose, then for no other reason than climate Bangalore would be my choice. Situated at a height of about 3000 ft. it is never unpleasantly hot except perhaps for a few hours in the middle of the day. It lies sufficiently far South not to suffer from extreme cold either, and has a charm all its own.

I had come to Bangalore in connection with a project only indirectly linked with War-on-Want and Sarva Seva Sangh, but naturally made contact with the Sarvodaya people there who with typical generosity offered me hospitality. Mysore State with its mere 327 declared Gramdan villages, where little or no constructive work is going on, would not otherwise have been on my itinerary. But my visit gave me a chance of finding out something about the lengthy and intricate procedure entailed in legalising the distribution of Bhoodan land.

The Bhoodan movement began in 1952. In Mysore State some 16,000 acres of land were donated. About 2,200 acres were distributed according to the principles laid down by Vinoba. But this by itself had no meaning. Action had to be taken to legalise the donations and distributions. In some states, as for instance in Bihar and Orissa, the necessary Act was passed fairly early but in Mysore State the Bhoodan Act did not receive Government assent until November 1963 and only came into force in July 1965. A set of rules was passed along with the Act. Consequently a Board was set up to deal with

the matter. A prescribed procedure had to be followed. The land gifts had to be investigated, and orders confirming them had to be passed by the Revenue officers. These orders had to be registered and the lands vested with the Board. The gift deeds were exempted from stamp duty, and instructions to this effect had to be circulated to all Registrars and Inspectors of Registration. From the papers that I saw I gathered that a complicated administrative machinery involving quite heavy financial expenditure was set up by the Board. Statistics of Bhoodan land were prepared by revenue villages and districts, and sent to the Government and the Board. They showed that 5,017 donations covered 15,864 acres of land spread over about 2,632 villages. Of these about 2,123 acres have been distributed among 914 people.

Procedures differ for land donated before the passing of the Act and after. Other factors further complicate legal distribution of donated land. Out of 5,017 donors only 1,623 gave particulars of record numbers at the time. The others simply declared their willingness to donate a certain number of acres. They themselves had no ready records. In some cases even the names of the villages where the land was located were not given. In others the donated land has since been acquired by other parties. Again in some cases the details furnished in the land gift declaration did not tally with entries in the revenue records.

In so-called straight-forward cases the revenue officers needed to register the survey numbers, publish a list in the Government Gazette, issue notices, hear objections, pass orders and effect the registration of orders passed, confirming the gift deeds. Only then could distribution be dealt with. Where survey numbers were not available personal contact with donors had to be sought for clarification, a lengthy and often complicated task.

These details explain to some extent why there has been so much delay in distributing Bhoodan land, a much criticised aspect of the programme.

I also had an opportunity of visiting the Panchayati Raj Training Centre, seven miles from Bangalore, established in 1962 by the Gandhi Memorial Trust with help from the Government. It is set in a plot of 350 acres as part of an ashram pro-

moted by Vinoba during one of his walking tours in Mysore State. The land has been developed on a commercial basis, demonstrating improved methods in agriculture, horticulture, fruit growing and dairying. Village industries serve as models for trainees.

The centre conducts two types of courses, of seven and three days respectively. The seven day institutional courses are conducted in the form of camps for members of the Taluk Board and chairmen, vice-chairmen and secretaries of the village Panchayats. The three-day peripatetic courses are conducted in centrally located villages, and are intended for village panchayat members.

It is worth quoting the syllabus for each type of training, for the subjects are so numerous that they can only be touched on in a short training period, and I wondered how much a trainee could possibly absorb and digest, and later implement. But considering the difficulty for any participant to free himself from his daily work which constitutes his livelihood, it is possibly the best that can be done in the circumstances.

The syllabus for the institutional course includes these subjects: 1. The principles of the Constitution and their implications, the Welfare State, the Five Year Plans, the Community Development Programme and Panchayati Raj; 2. The broad features of the Panchayati Raj organisations, the functional sub-committees and the associate organisations; 3. Structure and operation of the village Panchayats; 4. Obligatory and discretionary functions of the village Panchayats; 5. Duties and responsibilities of Chairmen and Vice-chairmen and members; 6. The principles and procedures involved in conducting meetings and official business of the Panchayats; 7. Resources of Panchayats, budgeting, accounting procedures and powers of the Panchayats; 8. Registers and records to be maintained by the Panchayats; 9. The relations of Panchayats with the Taluk Development Board, the District Development Council, and official agencies at different levels; 10. The relationship of Panchayats with the village co-operative, the school, young farmers' club, Farmers' Forum, Women's Associations, etc.; 11. Important planning at the village level with particular emphasis on agricultural planning and village industries;

12. A ten-point test for Panchayati Raj; 13. Village agricultural production plan; 14. National integration; 15. Latest development in the evolution of Panchayati Raj with particular reference to the State Legislation; 16. Any other topic relevant to the main subject.

The three day course also includes eleven subjects.

I was shown over the centre and buildings and met the staff for a short discussion. From this I gained the impression that each group, Panchayati Raj Training Centre staff and Khadi workers on the ashram side, were running along parallel lines without sufficient link-up or knowledge, perhaps even interest in the basic principles motivating each side. And I was reminded of J.P. Narayan's concern regarding Panchayati Raj and its relationship to the village community on the one hand, and the Khadi workers' training which was limited to village industries without sufficient orientation in an integrated development programme, on the other.

In Bangalore too I was asked to address two meetings, the first on Gramdan. I found this extremely difficult. My experiences were so recent, I was still so close to them. What could I say, what should I say? And I was given no time to prepare anything. I did my best and hoped for the best. The second one was even worse. I was asked to speak on the Peace Movement in Britain. Having never been a peace worker, and this never having been my subject, I had to refuse. But the meeting had been advertised, I had to appear and I had to speak on something. But what? In the end we chose Voluntary Societies in Britain.

Next morning I left for Hyderabad, for the purpose of seeing the Nutrition Research Laboratory, a singularly rewarding visit. As so often when meeting men and women of the calibre of the director and some of his staff, hope for the future of India is strengthened. It emphasised for me the need for intensive nutrition programmes in Gramdan villages, for training male and female Sarvodaya workers in the scientific application of changed dietary habits based on research findings, and for creating among the villagers a better understanding regarding the growing of food and its uses. As long as food means filling the belly and nothing more, malnutrition will continue even

with an increased food intake. The recent drought in Bihar showed that under duress people will change from eating rice to eating wheat. So the old maxim 'You can't change people's food habits', does not hold any longer. It simply proves that it can be done although it won't be easy.

While I was talking to a young research worker recently returned from a post-graduate study in the U.S.A., I asked her, 'Do you find your field work in the villages discouraging?' 'Yes', she replied. 'When I first returned and started this work I became very depressed. But one gets hardened and I simply look at it now as a job that needs doing, both in the research laboratory and in our applied field studies. I no longer allow myself to become emotionally involved as I did at first.'

Hyderabad deserves more time than a mere stop-over but kind friends showed me as much of the old city and university as was possible before I found myself once more on a train heading North.

The hours I have spent travelling by train over the last year must add up to weeks, not days; journeys by bus, jeep, lorry, cycle rickshaw, bullock cart and tonga would add another month. I got tired of so much travelling, of never stopping for long in one place, but not of train journeys as such. Indian railways are an experience not to be missed. When travelling on my own the rare first class journey could become rather boring, not so going third. Except for the odd time when my coach resembled a cattle truck rather than a conveyance for human beings, I was quite happy once I had got on to the train and established myself on my bunk and seat. When the numerous non-travelling family members and friends had departed, everyone fitted himself into the available space like pieces into a jig-saw puzzle. Travellers were wonderfully friendly and each section of the coach formed itself into a kind of temporary club with unlimited membership. I spent much of the time resting on my bunk forgetting and ignoring the turmoil underneath.

On one occasion an old man and a gaggle of seven aged village women crowded into my end of the coach. They were on

a pilgrimage of several months. They all wore white and were travelling with enough luggage to fill a pantechicon. For some reason or other they started off with an aversion against using the latrine, and at every unscheduled stop in the countryside they hopped in and out of the coach and on to the embankment like a team of athletes performing a relay race. They had only one bunk opposite mine. At night they pulled tin trunks into the space between the seats underneath and laid themselves out sardine fashion and I was stuck on top. Getting down would have meant stepping on to a human carpet. A young couple had the seats and bunks next to mine, and over the need for holding babies and such like we became friends for the duration of the journey and could share our amusement at the pilgrims who without inhibition burst into hymns and prayers at sunset and dawn. By the morning they had overcome their reluctance to use the latrine and disappeared into it one by one where they not only changed their clothes but washed them too, and for the next few hours we found ourselves entangled among yards of wet saris, blouses and underskirts, some of which streamed out of the windows like huge white banners. While the pilgrims hopped out on to embankments, the young couple and I hopped out in turn whenever the train stopped at a major station to buy endless cups of tea and fill flasks with water. The husband was much better than I at getting tasty snacks to eat which we shared between us. There is always so much going on, so much to see and watch that boredom is never one of the discomforts of third class travel.

On buses and jeeps one comes closer to the countryside and people. Bazaars and villages press in on one almost physically. There is no escape from reality. On the open road life recedes and advances in tidal waves, now abstract and intangible, now concrete and suffocatingly close.

Ahead stretches mile after mile of road. One's senses get blunted by the monotony of the noise from roaring engines and incessant hooting. I see things unconsciously through eyes that no longer focus. Where was it I saw those camels, placing their feet with deliberate movement, feet that remind me of an old woman's soft squashy bedroom slippers, camels that look down their supercilious noses at us? And the little donkeys with

doleful eyes and velvet-soft muzzles, ears pricked while the bales of washing, or bricks, or sacks, press on their spines and hind-quarters until their spindly legs are permanently X-shaped. Or when not carrying loads their feet are hobbled so tightly that they need minutes to get across the road from one scanty patch of grass to another in short staccato hops. Beneath a tree sit monkeys delousing their young, in the doorways of mud huts sit women delousing their children. The same posture of bodies, the same movements of hands, the same frown of concentration on their foreheads and the same disinterested stare on the faces of their young. Did I see the women squat on the roadside and the monkeys in doorways, or squatting side by side under trees? Was it in Bihar, the Konkan or in Tamilnad? It doesn't matter. It's the same here and there and everywhere. Suffering humanity! Do I suffer because I know of better things? Do they because they don't? Is this sharing? If I give a coin to one beggar, to ten, to a hundred I don't solve the beggar problem. If I clean up one child, or ten, or a hundred, I don't solve the problems of dirt, squalor and disease, nor do I do so by living at their level as a gesture of identifying myself with the masses.

If I were to wear Khadi instead of mill-cloth would I identify myself with the Sarvodaya workers, with the Gandhian theory of decentralised village industries, or would I merely assist a relief programme which employs so many people who would otherwise be jobless and hungry?

The problem of Khadi was forever with me. Its origin is quite clear-out. In a conversation with Indians in London in 1908 Gandhi had seen 'as in a flash that without the spinning-wheel there was no Swaraj (freedom)'. In 1920 the Indian National Congress adopted hand-spinning and the weaving of Khadi as a 'measure of discipline and self-sacrifice for every man, woman and child'. Within ten years, by about 1934, the production of Khadi at the centres connected with the All-India Spinning Association had reached ten million square yards covering nearly 6,000 villages. A general policy was adopted of running only those centres that were self-supporting.

Gandhi considered the spinning-wheel a means of mass education, a link between the masses and classes, a symbol of the dignity of labour, and a check on the drain of wealth to



foreign countries.

To the question whether Khadi was economically sound he replied: 'Khadi is the only true economic proposition in terms of millions of villagers until such time when a better system of supplying work and adequate wages is found in the field, cottage or factory in every one of the villages in India.' He added that 'Khadi may be interpreted to include other village industries'.

Gandhi emphasised that the mere social objective of providing employment or the economic objective of producing Khadi for sale, was not the core of the Khadi programme. Khadi, according to him, could begin 'to have permanent effect only when carried out as part and parcel of a wider programme of non-violent village uplift or village re-construction.' The cardinal point in this approach was to build up self-reliance among rural people. He emphasised the need for self-sufficiency, decentralisation of production and consumption, production of Khadi without any subsidies from the Government, and its sale in local markets and to the people in the villages. Government assistance 'was to be confined to education, technical research and technical guidance, and the cultivation of cotton to reduce dependence on imports.

After Gandhi's death in 1948, the constructive workers turned for direction and guidance to Vinoba Bhave, who retained the hard core of Gandhi's approach in regard to village self-sufficiency marked by considerable liberalism in the use of mechanisation and a recognition of the position which the sale of Khadi had come to occupy. For Khadi had become commercialised and Vinoba raised the question what role the Sarva Seva Sangh should play in its development. In 1954, it was decided that commercial production and sales should not be handled directly by the Sarva Seva Sangh, which should restrict itself to finding ways and means of making Khadi village-oriented. So the Khadi Board was formed with members from the All-India Spinners Association. But a body handling production and sales must be registered as a non-governmental body, or be directly connected with the Government. Jawaharlal Nehru thought it the duty of the Government to support Khadi and village industries, and a semi-governmental body was

formed by special legislation in Parliament in an attempt to bring Khadi directly under government patronage. There was an unofficial understanding at that time that the managerial body of five members was to be appointed by the Prime Minister from nominations made by the Sarva Seva Sangh; thus it was that the Khadi Commission came into being. At that time total production was worth Rs. 20,000,000 and rose to Rs. 250,000,000 in the following ten to twelve years with the support of government money. All government loans to the Khadi Commission were interest free. So there was easy money available and as the years went by the voice of the Sarva Seva Sangh got lost in the government machinery. As thousands of rupees were involved in the Khadi Commission the Government sent its own people to the Commission as advisers.

In the early days of the Khadi Commission the Government gave subsidies on all sales of Khadi, which benefited the consumer but not the producer. Vinoba therefore started the scheme whereby yarn is exchanged for woven cloth to shift the emphasis from sales in cities to the villages. The weaving charge on top of spinning pay had made Khadi expensive. How could the villager buy back cloth so produced? Vinoba's idea was that the weaving charges should be paid for by the Government and the villager pay for the cloth with his spun yarn. But even this was not fully implemented. There are not sufficient weavers at the village level to deal with the spinners' yarn, and the cloth which he gets from the Khadi centre in the village or small town was still too expensive while the weaving was done by institutions. The villager expected ten yards of cloth for his 40 hanks of yarn but got only eight to offset expenses.

Long discussions between the Khadi production centres and the Government followed. The centres asked that the Government should carry the sales commission charges.

These are technical difficulties but there are also psychological factors. Through the vast expansion Khadi workers and Khadi institutions became business minded. In 1945 there were 5000 Khadi workers, today there are 50,000. The original 5000 workers were imbued with the spirit of serving the community. At the present day the 50,000 workers are in the Khadi Commission for the sake of a job as in any other employment.

Vinoba's idea created anxiety among them that they might be losing their jobs to the villagers. The villagers were not interested in Khadi, and Khadi as envisaged by Gandhi has failed; for the spinners were only interested in getting their wages and not in obtaining woven cloth. With Gramdan the economic aspect of Khadi is being revived. Each villager, were he to spin his own yarn, would save at least Rs. 200 a year, the amount he pays for cloth annually. But so far he does not understand this except in isolated instances.

In Andhra Pradesh 800 Khadi workers left the Khadi Commission and set up their own association in an attempt to take Khadi back to the villagers. In Bihar the State Khadi Institution is transferring the Khadi work to Khadi associations formed by workers and villagers. A transformation is slowly taking place.

The recent Ashok Mehta Commission recommended the change of the terms Khadi and Village Industries Commission to Rural Industries Commission. This would then enable the Handloom Board and Silk Board to come in and push Khadi aside, and, instead of becoming village oriented, rural industries would be set up to promote sales in towns instead of being geared to rural consumption, and the villager would again be no better off. If this new body comes into existence the Khadi Commission will be dissolved. The Ashok Mehta Commission also recommended a ceiling for financial help to the various Khadi institutions engaged in training workers. It is felt that this would further jeopardise Khadi and village industries.

It is quite obvious that the whole subject of Khadi was causing much concern in Sarvodaya circles. In February of this year more than a thousand workers attended an All-India Khadi Workers' Conference. The point was made that with every Five-Year-Plan unemployment and under-employment increased rather than the opposite. Khadi could not fulfil its objectives of giving employment in rural areas in isolation. It had to be integrated with agriculture, animal husbandry and other village industries. Rural industrialisation had to be based upon improved techniques and the adoption of intermediate technology as an integral part of economic policies on the national level.

Following the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Report a further meeting was held in June, and earlier resolu-

tions reiterated. Subsidiary occupations for agriculture had to be promoted on the basis of regional self-sufficiency involving local processing of all consumer goods for which raw materials were available, and protection for such decentralised industries had to be assured by the Government.

Studying the history of Khadi and reading the various reports helped me in justifying my own doubts and criticisms regarding Khadi and village industries. For months I had been surrounded by people wearing Khadi, talking Khadi, producing Khadi. 'If by buying Khadi and paying a little more than for mill cloth I am giving employment to spinners and weavers in rural areas, then this is sufficient reason for me to do so', said the secretary of the Gandhi Memorial Trust in Delhi. 'If you can suggest to me alternative employment for the thousands of villagers earning their livelihood by producing Khadi, I will burn every spinning wheel in the country in one huge bonfire at Rajghat. Until then I buy Khadi and wear Khadi', said a brilliant young Sarvodaya worker, a first class honours graduate in economics. 'I never knew Gandhi, I am not emotionally involved. I have come to Gandhi with my head on the basis of what my intellect tells me, not with my heart!'

At the end of each tour I tried to sort out my impressions in the hope that eventually I would be able to reach some conclusion or at least form some kind of opinion. But invariably I found myself faced with the same vital question. How can Gramdan, or any community development programme, produce results unless those involved have the kind of training which is essential for the job? A felt need for different aspects of development will have to be created among the villagers. Those who know what they want must be taught how to set about achieving their goal. Those who are meant to do the teaching must be trained in such a way that they can readily identify with village and villagers' problems and have the technical and scientific knowledge to tackle them.

It may be argued that the extension officers attached to 'Blocks' fulfil this role, that men are qualifying in sufficiently large numbers from agricultural colleges, that in fact not all of them find jobs. This may be so. But it has also been argued that under the present set-up only those villagers benefit who are already financially and educationally in a position to do so, leaving the impoverished and backward exactly where they were twenty years ago; that development plans by the time they are ready for implementation are no longer related to existing needs; that a development programme cannot be conceived and executed from behind a desk.

With a good monsoon last year a bumper crop was harvested. A break-through in agriculture has come about. Twenty-five per cent of the rural population are supposed to be better off today. But what of the other 75%? Unless they too can benefit the gap between poor and rich will widen, not close.

The Sarva Seva Sangh didn't need me to point this out. They knew the situation only too well. But how to change it was a different matter.

In 1966, Frank Harcourt-Munning, the Administrator of War-on-Want, Radhakrishna, the secretary of the Sarva Seva Sangh, and Prem Bhai, the man behind the Agrindus Victor Gollancz Memorial Institute, conceived the idea of founding an institution which would answer this particular need.

It would not be a place for mere academic studies, with an attached model farm, but would become the hub of the wheel whose spokes would reach out in an ever-widening radius, touching the land and the people in the wake of its revolutions. It would become the nucleus of a massive programme for training people who would in turn train others, embracing villagers, village workers and the experts who would plan for the whole area and function as catalysts. The programme needed to be two-fold. It would have to impart knowledge, to teach techniques of newly acquired skills, and to promote the development of a changing attitude among the villagers.

Training and education would be based on productive activities leading to self-reliance and increased self-confidence, with an emphasis on job training. They would aim at a rise in social and economic standards, and at improvements for the individual and the community as a whole, and not at mere paper qualifications which might alienate the student from the land and his village either by length of absence from his home back-ground or by theoretical knowledge which he could not apply practically and which would only draw him into the urban slums to join the numberless army of unemployed.

Equal stress would have to be placed on training in citizenship and democratic values. For the youth of today and the children of tomorrow must recognise their responsibility to the country as a whole, understand its political structure, and be ready and able to play their part.

But unless there are men qualified to impart technical knowledge as a basis for a constructive overall development programme in Gramdan villages, the training of a few hundred boys will achieve nothing. The institute would therefore draw Saryodaya workers from various states and equip them with the

necessary 'know-how'.

So the search began to find an appropriate site in surroundings which would be a challenge to students and teachers alike, which would stretch the imagination and keep alive the principles on which the institute was to be founded.

I met Prem Bhai soon after I reached Benares and took an immediate liking to this strong and stockily built man with a face that could light up with humour or cloud with stubborn determination. The rare phenomenon of a dreamer who could make dreams come true, who exclaimed, 'I don't believe in failure!'

Prem Bhai was born in Meerut in 1935. Both his parents belonged to the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement of which his father was a leading member. His mother too was a Sanskrit scholar and when her husband died just before Prem was born she started an independent school and developed this into a college of which she is still the principal. After matriculation Prem took his B.Sc. in physics and chemistry at Meerut University. During that time he participated, as a part-time worker in Sarvodaya activities, but he also read communist literature. He listened to Vinoba when he visited Meerut and later to J.P. Narayan and talked with people in the movement. He became gradually convinced that there must be a better way to achieve the desired objectives. He went to Bihar in 1953 to join the movement against forceful eviction of tenants from their land, and met leading Sarvodaya workers like Dhirendra Mazumdar and Ramamurti. After his finals he got more deeply involved with the Sarvodaya workers in Meerut district. He started a mobile library and a study club of Sarvodaya literature. But he was not satisfied. He needed more knowledge if he was to be effective and he took a post-graduate course in Sociology. When he met Dhirendra Mazumdar for the second time in 1956, the old stalwart asked Prem what he intended to do. Prem didn't know. Dhirendra Mazumdar invited him to Bihar and all through 1957 Prem toured villages in the Monghyr district with Ramamurti. In 1958 he became a teacher at Khadigram and taught maths., science, agriculture and dairying. But he felt he was not growing. The social workers only seemed

to talk. For him this was not good enough. He felt a social worker should have a profession as well with which to bring about change, and he therefore wanted to learn more about agriculture and village industries. He also felt he needed to study socialism and communism more extensively as a means of comparison with Sarvodaya ideologies. He wanted time to think and formulate his own socio-political philosophy.

So he set out to see the country and to study conditions for himself. For the next two years he stayed with various progressive farmers, he moved from institutions in Maharashtra to Bombay, to Madhya Pradesh, to Rajasthan Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, the Punjab, to the Institute of Agriculture in Allahabad, and finally joined Annasahib Saraswebuddhe at Sevagram in 1961 where he conducted an agricultural experiment. He proved that four acres could give a fairly good living to an average sized family, two acres if the land was irrigated. He then made contact with Israel. Rather than visit their country he invited Israelis to Sevagram to join him there. Two came. Prem steadily increased his knowledge. He conducted two further experiments, then began travelling the country once again, this time advising workers on new agricultural techniques.

Prem had now enough confidence to handle an agricultural development project and training programme. By the time he met Frank Harcourt-Munning he was ready. He had developed some definite ideas on how to effect the necessary social and economic change in India's villages. The moment was right. The idea for the Agrindus Institute was born.

Early one morning on a hot humid day in late August Radhakrishna, Prem and I left Varanasi by car and at first passed the usual type of bazaars strung along on either side of a fairly good road. But gradually we ascended into hilly country of singular beauty so that the 100 mile journey to Renukoot became a pleasant and unexpected surprise.

Renukoot is a new township situated where the U.P. borders Bihar to the East and Madhya Pradesh to the South. To the West stretches a vast lake, the reservoir created by the recently



finished Rihand dam. This has brought hydro-electric power to a large area and is feeding new industries. Already an aluminium factory is fully operative, there are two cement works, chemical plants are under construction, and small businessmen are doing well. Buildings and bazaars have sprung up like mushrooms; a new town, a new industrial centre, bursting with ever more activities, an entrepreneur's paradise.

But the gain to industry has been achieved at a high cost. The flooding of the valley displaced thousands of people from their homes and fields and drove them into the wooded hills, there to settle in existing villages or form new ones.

The Government had hopes of constructing model villages with proper sanitation, neatly arranged rows of houses, roads, schools and other amenities for the displaced villagers. But as always when bureaucracy is planning time drags on, weeks become months and months years. The people became tired of waiting and demanded compensation in lump sums. The Government acceded to their demands, abandoning its plans. The money was soon spent. No Government compensation could possibly make up for the loss these untrained people suffered.

At the time of the Rihand dam construction the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Govind Ballabh Pant, invited the Gandhi Memorial Trust to start a service centre in the area to benefit this backward and impoverished community, and in 1962 the Banvasi Ashram was started at Govindpur. The workers erected a few simple buildings around a rectangular courtyard, and tried to help the people in every way they could within their limited means. The task was not easy. Many areas were practically inaccessible, workers were unwilling to go and live in those villages, and if they did so the tribals often decamped and went further into the jungle. Wild life caused terror among workers and villagers. Even so six sub-centres were set up, Gandhian ideologies were propagated, and some small-scale industries started.

The year was 1967, a year of drought, crop failure and famine. The Gandhi Memorial Trust organised relief, 55 free kitchens were set up, employment projects undertaken, such as the building of tanks, forest clearance, bunding and so on.

The Sarva Seva Sangh joined in the effort and War-on-Want sent funds.

At the moment only a jeepable track connects Govindpur with Renukoot. We had to leave the car and proceed with a borrowed jeep, along nine miles of jungle road, and reached the ashram some 45 minutes later. Outside the ashram gate people were squatting in rows, eating-vessels on the ground in front of them, awaiting their daily ration of wheat porridge in payment for their work on the dam construction and land reclamation.

Our drive through the jungle helped me to appreciate what had already been done towards establishing the base farm of the Institute. Prem had started work three months earlier. The entire area had then been covered by shrub and trees, the ground uneven and undulating and littered with stone and rocks of every size. Land reclamation was therefore of the first importance. This in itself became a training programme for 500 to 1000 people, and illustrated what could be done simply by hard labour and with familiar tools.

Prem showed us over his domain. The 70 acres of reclaimed land are scattered in terraced plots. As soon as the monsoon broke at the end of June, millets, maize, paddy and sesame were sown. A mango and guava grove was planted and a lime orchard started. We looked at the sprouting crops and orchard seedlings trying to imagine what it would be like in the future. We stood on the bank of the reservoir picturing the water irrigating acres and acres of farmland. We sat with Prem in one of the simple ashram buildings and planned. Already there was an outreach beyond the immediate boundaries of the institute land through the seed distribution scheme. A work camp was planned for November for about 1000 boys to give them some idea why training and the adoption of new methods were essential. Three months—and so much done already. Would Prem be able to sustain the pace?

The jeep which had brought us had returned in the morning. So while we trudged the four miles to the nearest railway point I listened to Prem and Radhakrishna mapping out the future programme. There seemed to be no limit to the possibilities of development, given adequate finances and sufficient numbers

of well qualified personnel. At Muirpur we caught a train for Renukoot, a distance of five miles, and there spent the night at the Government rest house. I had so recently arrived in India that I was not yet equipped either mentally or materially. I had brought my tooth brush, but had forgotten that I would need bedding and a towel. I took a shower and stood under the fan until I was dry enough to dress. I was never caught out like this again. Next morning we returned to Benares.

I went back to Govindpur in January. It was now cold. Bright sunshine alternated with winter showers. I went to bed in socks and woollies and every bit of bedding I could lay my hands on, and waited for the midday sun before taking a bath bucket style. The work camp had taken place. Some 167 youths from 40 villages had constructed a second earthen dam across a local stream to create another irrigation tank. They worked five hours each morning, attended lectures on different subjects in the afternoons, and the evenings were filled with cultural activities. From among this group 25 students were selected for intensive training—the first batch of intakes. The once quiet ashram atmosphere was filled with young voices and bursts of activity.

It is still dark at 5 o'clock in the morning during these winter months when it is time for the boys to get up. Immediately the day's teaching begins with the use of trench latrines not known in the villages, leading to a knowledge of how not to waste night soil. It is also cold at that hour, and at 6 a.m. the boys warm up with physical exercises and songs that are specially composed and designed to relate word to work and ideas such as the Bhoomi Sena, the land army. And in case there is any doubt regarding the field of outreach the farmer's children, next door sing the songs as well and continue long afterwards when the students have settled down to their classes in village industries. Just now they are taught spinning with box spindles but as soon as electricity reaches the Institute in a few months' time these will be replaced by ten multi spindles run on small motors. These semi-automatic spindles will give sufficient yarn to a village of about 200 to 300 people. Two boys are learning weaving in nearby village while one of the trainers organises the weaving in his and other villages in the vicinity.

Breakfast is at 7.30, and from 8 o'clock till noon the fields and the land become the classroom. Individual instruction is given on the spot, related to actual work.

At noon it is time for baths, food and rest until at 2 p.m. learning continues in the classroom. Teaching varies between straight talks and discussions on agriculture, i.e. diseases of paddy, potatoes and other crops and their remedies; on irrigation; soil reclamation; on manures and fertilisers and their uses; on spraying with insecticides; schedules of cultivation, seed preservation, grain storage, afforestation, dairy, poultry, fisheries, maintenance of implements; on village industries, e.g. rural textiles and other local industries such as the fibre industry; the lac industry which produces sealing wax, bangles and varnishes and which has been dying out in the district where it was once flourishing; the production of ingredients for 'pan'; the preservation of fruit and vegetables, processing of cereals and so on.

'How can I forget what I have seen with my eyes or done with my hands? I have not learned from books or only been taught in the classroom.' The boy had looked up in amazement when asked: 'Will you remember what you have learned at the Institute when you go back to your village? For it will take time before you have the resources to reclaim land, to terrace and bund it and sow your seed.' We were talking to the students during the afternoon lecture period. Most of them had now been there for three months and I was looking at the boys' attentive faces, at the expression in their eyes. Gone was the uncertainty, the mixture of hope and sadness, that I had seen among so many of the village youths elsewhere—youths who knew what they wanted to do, what they wanted to learn, who were wondering if the day would ever dawn when they could make a beginning to improve their villages, when they would know how to bring about change and prosperity; when they could translate the promise of Gramdan into productive action. For some of them this year, for many more in the days to come, this promise will be fulfilled.

The boy said: 'We used to depend on God, for we had nothing and knew nothing.' But today they know that they also have resources for they are taught how to utilise these;

how to take up a loan on their land or even sell five acres out of fifteen to buy a pump, because they understand that by using irrigation and new techniques the remaining acres will give them double and treble the yield and they will be able to repay the loan or re-buy the land and reclaim more land next year.

They are taught how to think and how to act, how to account and budget their expenditure and profits, and how to increase their capital resources. They are taught to co-operate by forming a 'labour' bank in the village, and service co-operative societies. The boys selected as trainee trainers are instructed in the theory of planning and managing the construction work which they then undertake in outlying villages under the guidance of the staff. In anticipation of the arrival of the well-digging rig two boys have gone for training to the Friends Rural Centre at Rasulia in Madhya Pradesh, and one other trainee trainer to Bhopal for instruction in tractor driving and vehicle maintenance to be ready to use and service the tractor; bull-dozer and landrover when they arrive from England, and to teach others to do so. I saw the boys before they left Govindpur and again three months later at Rasulia just before they were returning. Three thin, bony and lanky youths, apprehensive of venturing so far afield, had changed into self-possessed young men. They had eaten their fill and put on weight. For the first time they had to handle money and pay for their keep. They were learning about life outside the security of their families, their villages and the Institute. They had acquired more than mere technical skills.

The boys in the classroom at Govindpur knew what they were talking about and told us what they had learnt from the making of compost to sowing and line transplantation, to inter-cultivation, irrigation and staking of tomatoes.

'What will you do when you return to the village and find your elders will not adopt your new methods?' we queried. 'I will ask my father for a small plot,' said one of them, 'so that I can prove to him that new techniques are better. And he will see with his own eyes and will be convinced.' The boy was right. He had watched the farmer next door to the Institute, had talked to him and knew that he was competing with the

Institute farm. 'What they can do, I can do too,' the farmer had declared. I had only to look at his field of barley to know that this was no idle talk

The boys knew that they could reclaim jungle land, level, terrace and bund a plot and see the first crop come up within four and a half months, for they had done it at the Institute farm. So why not on their own village land? They knew that their own fields only yielded 25 maunds (1000 kgs) per acre whereas here they had harvested 50 maunds (2000 kgs) per acre on newly reclaimed land.

But they were young boys and they needed relaxation. So after another hour in the fields from 3.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. it was time for games. Even now the day was not over. Between 5.30 p.m. and the evening meal at 7.30 p.m. those boys who were literate taught the non-literates. Two were studying for matriculation and others for secondary school examinations. And lastly they each wrote diaries on the crops of their choice.

A hard day and a long day. The boys looked happy and well. They were learning, living and eating with the staff and were in constant communication with them. There was no vacuum between teacher and pupil. They worked as a team and had forged a bond of mutual trust and understanding.

For the boys the day was now over but not for Prem and the staff. Every evening Prem held a staff meeting. The day's work was looked at in retrospect and the next day's programme planned in detail. Each member of staff, each pupil would know by sunrise what their tasks were to be.

We visited one of the villages where a small scale dam and irrigation project was being planned. When we arrived, villagers, the trainer and trainee were at the site taking measurements and shifting rocks. A meeting followed. Objections to the selected site were put forward, new sites proposed and inspected. No agreement could be reached. An element of jealousy, discord and disunity made this impossible. Prem stopped the work and gave the villagers time for further consideration. When they had settled their differences, work would start again. In the meantime he transferred the staff and equipment to another village.

Until the arrival of the land rover Prem had been borrow-

ing an old and battered jeep. A hundred yards from the Institute it broke down. This meant a ten mile walk through the jungle and along the railway line to Renukoot next day where I caught the bus back to Benares, a five to six hour journey.

• June 1968. The monsoon had come on time with plentiful rainfall. Hope rose for another good year and a bumper crop. Then in the first week of August, unpredicted and unexpected, the rains ceased. We drove from Benares to Patna, our eyes constantly scanning the sky. Clouds were gathering. Would they form themselves into rain clouds, would the monsoon break once more? Everywhere people were discussing the weather. Fear was in their eyes, in their voices. Another drought, another famine?

I travelled back to Benares by rail and on to Govindpur. From the train window I gazed at the countryside. Paddy, barely a foot high, was wilting at the edges, yellow tips curling. Acres of maize crop had shrivelled away, a harvest lost. Would there be famine? Not yet, not yet! There was still hope. The earth was crumbling in the heat, hard and solid underneath a thin layer of dust. Soon it would crack into pieces like a giant jig-saw puzzle without a picture, without meaning. The soil was baking into granite, the plough useless, too dry for sowing, too dry for seed to germinate. The whole countryside was bleached white in mid-September shimmering breathless in the heat. God, I cried, whom do you punish? Is it a warning lest farmers lapse back into complacency, relying on the vagaries of the elements, too indolent to dig wells?

The problem of irrigation was so vast. Two years of well digging had hardly made a dent. A month ago the jungle track from Renukoot to Govindpur had been one slimy slippery rubber-band, water standing in puddles. The wheels of the land-rover had slithered without hold, sliding from bank to bank and throwing up sprays of thick brown water or clods of mud. Today, ruts stood up sharp like knife blades. Hollows and hard ridges shook the vehicle into quivering, shuddering tremors like an animal crazed with fear. In the jungle, leaves on trees and shrubs hung limp and lifeless on their branches.

About a mile from the Institute gates the road turned sharply at a right angle. I gasped. Was this hallucination?

Before my eyes stretched acres of paddy, lush thick and upright, orchards of fruit trees, pulses and vegetables growing abundantly. Agrindus rose like a green mirage against a cloudless blue sky, alive and thrusting in a region that seemed moribund.

Is it possible that anybody could create such transformation within a year? Fences marked the boundaries of the Institute land. To my left lay the hillock, partially cleared of shrub and undergrowth in readiness for construction of the Institute buildings to begin. To my right stood neatly arranged piles of some 400,000 bricks, made by the open field kiln method with fuel cleared from Agrindus land. The cost of a thousand of these bricks amounted to Rs. 20 as against Rs. 100 for bricks brought from Benares. More bricks will be needed once the buildings go up, giving employment and wages to local men and women.

A year ago I had to search for the plots of cultivated land, today field beyond field was spread before me. To my left I caught a glimpse of the first irrigation tank. The water level was lower than a month ago, but still, for the time being, the crops would not suffer. To my right, unseen, I could imagine the second tank and pretend I heard the diesel pump and the splash of water as it flowed from one terraced plot to the next.

Outside the ashram gate, at the very spot where a year ago the people had squatted awaiting their food for work, a simple structure had come up within the last month; the dispensary conducted by Dr. Ragini, Prem's wife. Each morning a constant trickle of patients attended the clinic. Ragini was charging for the drugs, which limited attendance. But then the clinic was only part of a comprehensive welfare scheme, incorporating preventive medicine and family planning as part of an integrated village extension programme.

Inside the courtyard things had been smartened up. Papaya seedlings had grown into tall trees beyond the roof tops of the old buildings, heavy with fruit. Flower beds bordered the square. At the far end stood the hand-pump, providing safe drinking-water from the well bore drilled with the recently arrived Halco-Tiger rig. Exploratory bores were being drilled



at selected points on the farm for further irrigation schemes.

'Where are the students?' I asked Prem, for I missed the sound of their voices. 'They left in April and returned to their villages', he replied, 'except the trainer trainees who are working on various programmes.' 'I had to bring the base farm to a stage of development where I can use it for demonstration and teaching purposes', he explained further. 'For the last few months I needed labour, not students. But one of my staff is on a recruiting drive now.'

As we walked over the farm Prem talked about his pattern of crop rotation, about land utilisation and dry farming, about seed standardisation and seed multiplication for distribution to the farmers in the 100 Gramdan villages for which extension work was being planned. He showed me the horticultural nursery, explained to me the fodder crops, and uses of fertilisers and compost, the use of improved implements, how the bulldozer and tractor had helped.

The coming year would constitute the most important phase for the Institute, when construction of permanent buildings would start, when the farm would begin its self-expanding, self-supporting economy, when more farmers' camps would be organized, when more emphasis would be placed on agricultural training for villagers, managerial courses for area organisers, on courses in co-operating farming, processing and marketing of agricultural produce of all kinds.

In a number of villages tanks and wells had been completed or were under construction, farmers had been helped in various directions, and surveys for economic development were being undertaken with the help of a team from the Gandhian Institute of Studies at Benares. A scheme for adult literacy classes in the 100 villages had been taken up. Already 54 literate villagers had been trained as teachers and 37 evening classes had been organized by them in 21 villages to benefit some 850 people.

But unless the monsoon broke again, unless there were more and adequate rain within a week, all energies would have to be switched to work for food programmes to avoid widespread famine. The menace of the impending drought forced itself into our discussions. Prem knew no uncertainty, only

determination to tackle an emergency situation should it arise.

On the way back to Benares clouds gathered on the horizon, the sky darkened, and a first sharp shower fell on the parched land, to be followed by heavy rains in the Eastern U.P. and Bihar averting one of the most wide-spread droughts in recent years. My heart leapt for joy as the heavy drops of rain fell on me. In some way Prem and his Institute had for me become symbolic of the man who does not believe in failure, of the dreamer who makes dreams come true.

On one of the rare occasions when Radhakrishna and I were both at Benares at the same time he asked me to accompany him to Ballia. 'Ballia has declared District Dan', he said. 'Vinoba will be there and other leaders, as well as thousands of workers from all parts of Uttar Pradesh and even further afield. I want you to get the feel of the atmosphere and talk to people. There will be celebrations, seminars, discussions. I would like you to stay for the whole of the time, July 10th to 15th.' Oh dear, I thought. I had just got back from another three months' tour during which I had moved from city to city to collect opinions from people not directly involved in Gramdan or even openly opposed to it. I was tired of travelling, tired of talking and listening. I wanted to sort out impressions, wanted time to think. I felt flat, numb and dull. The last thing I wanted to do was to make another effort. I was a free agent, I could say no. But I didn't. After the contradictory comments about Tinneveli District Dan it would be foolish to miss this opportunity. I gave myself a mental and physical push and got ready.

'You' ll be all right,' John encouraged me as he saw me off at the station. 'You are travelling in high-powered company.' J.P. Narayan and his wife were with me: Manmohan Choudhury, the chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh; Radhakrishna, its secretary; Narayan Desai, secretary of the Shanti Sena, and others. Among them was Subha Rao, whose beautiful singing voice was to delight me whenever it soared forth from the many loud-speakers installed in the compound of the local college at Ballia where the gathering took place.

But I had not reckoned with the crowd of white khadi-clad workers who packed the platform at Ballia to receive and garland the Sarvodaya leader. One moment we were peacefully waiting for the train to come to a halt, the next I felt like a cork on an ocean wave and found myself separated from the party. Like a drowning man I splashed and struggled in a sea of people and made a desperate grab at Radhakrishna's shirt tail as for a safety belt. I followed in his wake through the guard of honour which lined the passage to the station forecourt. A voice hailed me. I turned quickly to see Shashi Kant's smiling face, his shining eyes sparkling with excitement, heard his joyous greeting. Our hands clasped for a moment in recognition. It was the last I saw of him close at hand. Now and again his head swam to the surface among the nameless sea of faces which surrounded me from now on. But we never met again until we were both safely back at the Sarva Seva Sangh office and at our tables which stood there side by side.

Officially District Dan was declared on June 3rd. It took two years, four months and three days to achieve. The campaign was inaugurated on January 1st 1966 with the declaration of Gramdan by Jayaprakash Nagar, J.P.'s native village. The beginnings were slow, laborious and disappointing with only twenty gramdans secured in four months. The first Blockdan was declared after sixteen months of relentless efforts by forty full-time workers, and the first district subdivision within 23 months.

The pace was too slow to make any real impact. The workers were scattered in several blocks in order to make simultaneous contact with villagers, and to spread the concept of Gramdan over as wide an area as possible. But they were too thin on the ground, with disappointing results. There had to be a change of policy. From now on all the workers concentrated in one block at a time, several of them moving about together. It worked. Soon Blockdan followed Blockdan in quick succession. What had taken months before was now achieved in weeks. Sixty more workers from other districts of U.P. joined in the effort, and as a result the last subdivision in Ballia district came under Gramdan in exactly

eighteen days.

What does Ballia District Dan mean in terms of land and people? The total area encompasses 1,244 square miles of which roughly 600,000 acres are cultivated, 34% under irrigation. With a population of over 1,300,000 and 664 people to the square mile it is one of the most densely populated districts in the U.P. if not in India. Some 91% live in 2380 villages. The literacy rate is low. Scheduled castes comprise 14%. Out of the total population only 27% are employed and of these 75% are working on the land either as cultivators or labourers.

Ballia District Dan means that in fact 1,030,324 people have signed their names or put their thumbprints on documents with full, partial or perhaps little understanding of what it was all about. Ballia is the eastern-most district of the U.P. bordering on Bihar. The great pressure of an ever increasing population on the available land is accentuated by extensive soil erosion and losses of crops through annual flooding by the Ganges to the south and the Ghaghra to the North. The people of Ballia are said to be 'power-oriented' and possessed of an aggressive nationalism. The acceptance of Gramdan must therefore in some way open up new and different ways of power. The drive for Bihar Dan in the neighbouring state loomed as a potential danger zone at their door step. Would they be overtaken by events and left behind in a newly developing social order, they asked themselves? Dissatisfaction with present conditions helped. 'If Gramdan can provide a better alternative, let us have it', they said.

By the time we reached Ballia College it was dark. We were taken to the reception room and affixed with name discs. As these were written out in Hindi they were no good to me, for by the time I had deciphered the first two letters of the Devanagari script the person had moved on. And I didn't need to wear one at all. As the only white person there I was only too conspicuous. I was stopped wherever I went, particularly by the press. Who are you, what are you doing here, what do you think of it all? they invariably asked. Classrooms had become dormitories, that is people laid themselves out on the floors during the night, rolled up their bedding when

they wanted space to sit in groups during the day. Loud-speakers blared out messages and announcements in incomprehensible Hindi. One section of the compound was given over to the kitchen and we ate under a huge awning, sitting in rows on the ground, eating with our fingers off leaves and the crude little earthenware vessels which the village potters throw up on their wheels by the hundred, costing practically nothing. Servers doled out food from large buckets, ewers and baskets as fast as they could. We squatted down in relays. Even so it took two to three hours for every one to be served. As soon as one sitting had eaten we scooped up our leaves and vessels into a sodden dripping pack and moved over to some pits specially dug for the purpose and threw them in, making room for the next batch of eaters.

Vinoba was expected at 5 o'clock in the morning. Remembering the reception given to J.P. on the previous evening I refrained from going to the station. I have an unholy fear of being crushed by an emotional crowd.

The first session was called for 9.30 in the large hall standing separately in the college compound. I walked there in what I thought would be plenty of time. But when I entered, the hall was full by western standards. Men sat on one side of a gangway, women on the other. I tried to find a familiar face, a person who would speak a little English. I saw no one. I didn't dare sit on the men's side where the likelihood of some one speaking English was greater. I passed down three quarters of the hall and squatted down on the floor amongst the women. The V.I.Ps had already gathered on the stage. Subha Rao was at the microphone leading the singers while we waited for Vinoba and his party. By the time he arrived the hall was crammed even by Indian standards, and still more and more people pushed their way in. Not a breath of air came through doors and windows. They too were packed tight with bodies. Overhead the fans turned slowly and listlessly, churning up the heavy humid air. At times they stopped altogether.

Vinoba reached the stage. 'He looked fitter than a year ago and so did Krishnaraj Metha, Tai and the others. Tai caught my eye and smiled at me.' Then the proceedings began.

The chairman of the district council, Jawahar Singh, who had himself taken a leading part in the campaign, offered the district to Vinoba in Gramdan. He was a villager, he wore the dress of a villager, dhoti, shirt and turban, and he spoke like a villager. 'We in Ballia,' he said, 'are poor and steeped in ignorance. We are thirsting for liberation. In Gramdan we have found glimpses of this liberation. We hope that like rains of compassion you will visit Ballia every year to irrigate our hearts.' And on behalf of the people of Ballia he pledged their co-operation.

Vinoba accepted the pledge and responded with a short speech, then left the hall, and J.P. Narayan who was presiding over the meeting moved to the microphone and delivered a two hour address. He analysed the national situation and appealed to all political parties to co-operate. I could guess what he was saying for I had heard him talk in English on the same subject. I sat and watched and with every quarter of an hour I got more and more uncomfortable as the temperature rose. Perspiration ran down my face, neck and arms in rivulets, and my sari clung to me wet and limp. At that point I didn't think I could last out five days. There seemed no hope of ever seeing any one I knew, or, if I did, of getting close enough to make contact before they had again disappeared in the crowd.

At the moment there was nothing for it but to go back for the afternoon session. I made my way to the front of the hall as before and sat down. The meeting was just about to start. J.P. spotted me from the platform. He beckoned me to come up. 'It is a little cooler here', he said. I felt rather conspicuous up there, and moved crab-wise towards the side. There were people here I knew, people who spoke English and who, in spite of their pre-occupation, showed their customary courtesy and interpreted for me. I had broken through the wall of isolation that had built up around me. All at once I felt at one with the people.

Manmohan Choudhury was in the chair, metaphorically speaking, for he too squatted on the floor. Ramamurti introduced the subject of development and its two aspects. He pointed out that the people's strength diminished in the same

measure that the power of the State over them increased. They lost all sense of responsibility towards their own community, developing a false sense of security by handing over all responsibility to the government. It increased the disparity between man and man, an intolerable situation. He pleaded for its removal, and emphasized the necessity of linking development with science and technology. Vinoba supported him by observing that there were no real villages any longer, only families and groups of families, divided against themselves. Villages had to be rebuilt as homogeneous communities through Gramdan before development could begin. Where there is abundance of food, he said, the spirit is free. But in India today the body is starved of food as well as the spirit. Sarvodaya, he added, begins where distinctions between castes, creeds and communities end—the distinctions promoted by political parties.

Leading citizens of the town and leaders of political parties were present. Each one of them, including the District Planning Officer, voiced their full support, or at least their sympathy for Gramdan—except for the communist who got on to the all too familiar party line. He was answered by Manmohan Choudhury with an excellent speech.

I wondered how many of the speakers' comments were mere lip service. Would they support development on Gramdan lines when it came to the test? The District Planning Officer seemed to me the most important element in the situation. I approached him, and he asked me to breakfast next morning. He collected me in his jeep and took me to his pleasant bungalow in the civil lines. It was a rewarding visit. No one else was present. He convinced me that his speech the previous afternoon was not just a public gesture. He believed that Gramdan was the only answer for social change and economic progress in co-operation with government resources. Self-sufficiency of water for every village was basic and of the first priority if agriculture was to make strides. Storage of grain at village level was no immediate problem. Only after about two years would there be enough surplus stocks for small towns and districts to be concerned with proper storage facilities. A well alone was not good enough,



he explained, reverting back to his main topic; with it must go a Persian wheel and pump. But best of all would be the installation of tube wells, irrigating 50 acres at a time, although the cost would be Rs. 8,000 as compared with Rs. 3,000 for an ordinary well. The fostering of community feelings in Gramdan villages would safeguard communal use of such irrigation schemes. So far only five tube wells had been sunk. He also supported the Gramdan policy of self-sufficiency in cloth for every village.

The Planning Officer was a cultured, educated and sophisticated man coming from Lucknow. He had a clear concept of duty and how best to execute his programme. If Gramdan was instrumental in bringing about the necessary co-operation for the implementation of his plans, then he was ready to give his whole-hearted support.

'Tell Vinoba, tell J.P. what I have told you', he urged me as we parted. I did. He met J.P., Ramamurti, Radhakrishna and other prominent men for a preliminary talk, and a further meeting was arranged for the end of October when plans would be discussed in detail. No doubt the meeting would have taken place without my message, but I was glad to think I had played a part in bringing it about.

J.P. addressed the workers again on the following day. I had by now no hesitation in getting onto the stage from the rear entrance. I would squat at the back next to one or other of the many friends who beckoned me, and who interpreted at least the gist of what was being said.

'We are aiming at building the content of a total revolution through the medium of service and education', J.P. was saying 'During the struggle for independence the power of non-violence was used successfully by Gandhi for the first time. As a means of bringing about a revolution violence has proved ineffective, ending in turmoil, bloodshed and the confrontation of reactionary and revisionist forces. Parliamentary methods too have failed to bring about the necessary social changes. The only alternative left to us is the power of non-violence by means of the Gramdan movement.'

Replying to the doubts expressed on the previous day by the local communist leader, he said: 'You are engaged in a

deferred revolution, fighting amongst yourselves in the name of ideologies. Even the United Front governments with a communist majority have failed. 'You fight shy of telling the people that in your society there will be no private ownership of property—the sheet-anchor of your philosophy. I appeal to you to give your energy and support to Sarvodaya which is engaged in the process of a non-violent revolution.' And he exhorted the workers to lose no time in awakening in the people the courage and the strength required to bring about social change by non-violent methods.

Vinoba reminded the workers that the old name for Gram Panchayat—the village council of five—was 'Janapada', the oldest institution for promoting constructive work. The ancient Vedic prayers mention 'Janapada' as an institution of village administration. 'Our village is the smallest edition of the world', he quoted. 'Let there be a world view of life in the village, let the village be prosperous, full of health and vitality, untouched by any disease. Under the system of Janapada the village council looked after the administration. The five elected members were strong men under whose intelligent advice and guidance the whole village functioned harmoniously. In the course of time the country fell prey to external aggression and invasions. Villages were no longer the epicentres of life, viable and self-sufficient. They lost their freedom to administer their own affairs. Although the nation is free today, our villages are still in bondage, dictated to from outside and exploited.'

On the road between the campus and Vinoba's bungalow passed a constant stream of walking or motorised callers. However impatient the visitors, however urgent their problems, nothing disturbed the peaceful atmosphere. From Vinoba himself radiated a positive sense of deliberate calm. He would glance now and then at the men and women in the room, many who were there merely to listen, to take notes, to hang on his lips; or he would acknowledge the presence of villagers, faces pressed through the bars of the windows. Before him were grouped some prominent leaders of the movement. They

recounted to him resolutions formed at recent conventions. He let them have their say, then came down on them like a headmaster on clever pupils. He admonished them in no uncertain terms. Words must be spoken, plans evolved, but beware of too much talk at the executive level without a single thought permeating through to the masses. 'You must reach the people, nothing else is of any consequence' he said. How are you going to do it? Unless you reach every man, woman and child, how are you going to bring about the change you talk about? Let us have a paper, a magazine, which will bring news, our news to every village, to every town in the people's own language. You too separate yourselves from the masses. All your plans, all your good intentions will come to nought unless the masses become involved, unless they understand. Unless you keep in touch with them constantly, how can they know what is happening, how can you expect them to participate?

Another group he exhorted to patience. Purpose there must be and a goal, but let us beware of too much haste lest we achieve nothing! Urgency there must be, but not impatience.

He knows, I thought, far more of what is happening in the field than I had given him credit for. When I returned from the south, when I had felt disturbed and despondent at the lack of achievement, at the lack of implementation, at the isolation in which the movement seemed to be functioning, I had wondered how much Vinoba knew, how much he was aware of the disparity between aims and results. How could I have doubted? Vinoba knows his people, their abilities and their limitations. As strength flows from him to them, so he draws his own vitality from the masses whom he loves. And the people know it and respond.

To most questions Vinoba will shake his head. 'I am not here to tell you, find your own answer'. And with uncanny certainty one gropes and finds solutions for oneself.

'When I met you last year,' I asked him, 'you told me that unless the movement succeeded within the next four years, it will have failed. Do you still believe this?' The humorous twinkle appeared in his eyes. 'Answer, three-letter word.

Know what it is?' he shot at me. 'Y...e...s' I spelled out. 'Next question', I shot back at him. 'Three-letter word, w...h...y...?' 'Extra question,' he took me up quickly, 'doesn't count. No answer'. And a grin spread over his face at my perplexed one. 'Meeting over', he finished and joined in the laughter around us. 'Lets go!' and he stood up. He refused to be driven, and so in procession we walked along the road to the college and the meeting hall. Half-way across the compound he suddenly sat down. Is he unwell? I looked at him with concern. Oh, no! Nothing of the sort. 'I am not going back into that building', he said. 'If people want to hear me, let them come here.' And he looked mischievously about him like a naughty schoolboy. Nothing was going to shift him. Within seconds a wall of people, fifty or more rows deep, had formed around us. Within minutes he was bodily lifted onto a chair upon a table placed on benches. A microphone was thrust in front of him and he spoke to the crowd, unperturbed and unruffled as if all this had been normal and conventional.

Acharya Kripalani, veteran ex-President of the Congress Party, addressed the workers on another day. His aquiline face sparkled with wit, and he roused the audience to laughter as no one else had done.

I was on my way to talk to some Khadi workers about their participation in the campaign. I never got there because of my meeting with Dhirendra Mazumdar. What a grand old man! He gave me a whole hour of his time discussing the Gramdan philosophy, putting clearly and succinctly what I knew rather hazily.

'Democracy and socialism have to be rebuilt,' he said eventually. 'We must take into account historical experiences and find a new path. If democracy means that society should function through collective action and collective decisions of the people, then Gramdan is an effort to mobilise and train people towards this end. The present rule of Awe must be changed to a rule of Law. Gramdan seeks to do this. For centuries society has been controlled by violence. Today

the means of destruction have taken such proportions that even if one wished to use them, who would dare to? But violence on a lesser level persists. The challenge before us is to change society not through coercion but by persuasion. Persuasion must become a feature of our social behaviour pattern, and love not force become the instrument of social control. This is the true and spiritual aspect of the movement. All other aspects are simply programmes. Scientific development forces man to accept new pattern of progress. Vinoba insists that science and spiritual values must co-exist, and he is prepared to alter his programmes to fit the challenge of the times.'

One evening I talked to Ramamurti. 'You have been involved in this campaign', I said. 'Now that you have declared District Dan, what comes next?' 'The workers asked the same question', he replied. 'We held a meeting in May. Dharendra Mazumdar was also present, and we mapped out a programme. We must begin to form the village councils, immediately, and introduce an intensive mass education programme by organising a series of training camps for representatives from these councils. One twentieth of the land donated to the villages will be distributed in selected areas, and village funds set up. At least a thousand Sarvodaya sympathisers from towns and urban areas will be enlisted to help. A programme popularising Sarvodaya literature and enrolment to the Youth Peace Corps, the Tarun Shanti Sena, will be taken up in educational institutions. In the villages the village councils will be asked to settle disputes instead of allowing them to be taken to court. Court cases are a constant drain on the village economy, and by settling disputes amicably savings are made and immediately a sense of achievement and unity is created. Dharendra Mazumdar appealed in particular to the Khadi workers for a new approach. They should concentrate on strengthening the village councils instead of promoting institutions and organisations. They should help the people to fulfil their political aspirations within the structure of Gramdan, and assist in building an administrative tradition at the grass-roots level.'

As we were talking fifty or more village workers trained at

various institutions under the Kasturba Trust were gathering on a nearby lawn. 'Come and talk to the women', Ramamurti invited me. We joined them and settled in a circle in the rapidly falling dusk. 'What am I to say?' I asked. 'Tell them of your experiences in the villages', he replied. My mind flashed back to the various women's and children's programmes, and to the projects under the Social Welfare Board with which I had been connected several years ago. I told them what I had seen, what I had believed at one time to be the correct approach; that today I was not so sure any longer. In the light of my observations I had changed my ideas. I was afraid I might be talking into a vacuum but soon realised that I was arousing increasing interest.

'What we have all been doing', I explained, 'is good as far as it goes. But what does it amount to? We are dealing with society in sections and in horizontal layers according to age. Toddlers aged two to five years old come to the nursery class. The mothers' responsibility towards washing and feeding the children is to a large extent taken over by the teachers. At the age of six some of the children go to school if there is a school. In most cases this means up to the age of ten or eleven. Then there is no programme for them until as women they have an opportunity of joining literacy and craft classes or any other programme organized in the evenings. For various reasons there are often only nursery classes and no other activities. During the most formative years, ten or even younger up to marriage, boys and girls, except for the few obtaining secondary education, have no guidance, nothing to prepare them for life other than family and village tradition, which, however good or bad it may be, leaves them at the same social level.

'I would like to see an entirely different approach. If we want to bring about social changes we must involve all members of the family and relate our activities to their needs. It is no good training the men-folk in improved techniques of agriculture, teaching the children outside the home and only those women who are willing to come to a centre. Unless the workers who teach and the villagers receiving training in various fields are directed towards a common goal unity will remain

a precarious affair and progress will be inhibited as long as new methods are not understood and accepted by those concerned. Problems within the family involve them all, and are reflected in the behaviour and attitude of each individual. They should be discussed in the presence of them all and not separately in men's or women's meetings. A change in environmental sanitation, dietary habits, home-making, a raising of standards can, in fact, only be achieved with the participation of the whole family as a unit. There may be only one or two families willing to cooperate. But experience has shown that once the minority group causes the majority to become curious and interested in changes and improvements they will begin to copy, and gradually the reactionary elements will become the minority until they too conform. A Gramdan village offers the right kind of unifying atmosphere for a new approach to be attempted. The setting up of a community centre, nursery classes and other programmes should be the consequence of developing a felt need for such activities. It seems to me that work with and through the family is basic for establishing an integrated society capable of growing from within instead of having improved techniques, better methods and new ideas super-imposed from outside, involving the men here, the children there and the women somewhere in between if at all.'

I was nervously waiting for the girls' reactions. Only Ramamurti's encouraging nods had kept me talking. I needn't have worried. Question soon followed question showing keen interest, understanding and agreement, and a willingness to experiment. Many were conscious of the inadequacy of their present methods. I could tell Ramamurti later what I couldn't tell the girls, that unless there was a woman of sufficient dynamism with the right kind of training and social background acting as area organiser such a programme would be futile. The village level workers came from the same social strata as the families whose living standards they were meant to improve. Only continued inspiration, a heightened awareness and sensitivity could sustain their efforts and prevent their own reversion to outmoded habits. Ramamurti agreed. And I felt as I had done so often during this last year, how

badly I wanted to be involved in a programme, rather than flit from place to place, from people to people, observing and reporting, instead of 'doing.'

Before the days at Ballia drew to an end a meeting of the vice-chancellors and lecturers from various universities in Uttar Pradesh had been called. In recognition of the unfavourable climate which existed in educational institutions, and in order to lessen tension, rioting and disturbances, Vinoba had produced his latest 'brainchild' Acharya Kul, literally meaning 'family of teachers'. It was up to the teachers to help change the situation. They would take a pledge that they would not be members of any political party, or take part in any party political election propaganda, that they would regard the whole state as the field of their educational activities and try to quieten disturbances by persuasion, preventing police and other violent interference. The pledge was based on the concept that education like the judiciary should be free from government control, that teachers should not be involved in administration, but should be above power and party politics. The infiltration of party politics in the universities should be stopped, education should not be confined to the four walls of the class-room but extended to society at large. The teachers should have as wide a contact with people as possible, and try to find solutions to their many problems; greater sincerity in the pursuit of knowledge should pervade the entire atmosphere of the campus; teachers should give up their professional aloofness in order to have more intimate, personal contact with students, bound by mutual understanding; they should consider the whole world as their school, they should impose upon themselves the task for creating a moral climate, and give their moral guidance to society.

Vinoba recalled the glorious tradition of the Acharyas (teachers) in ancient India and the position they then held. For them education was a continuous process—learning never ended. 'Before I came to meet you today,' he said, 'I too studied and prepared myself. Teachers of today believe that they need no further preparation once they have left college.



They should remember the Acharyas of old and do likewise. Being a life-long teacher he felt himself in tune with the programme of Acharya Kul, but Gramdan was his first concern.

So at the final meeting Vinoba addressed himself once more to the workers. 'My present tour is like an ascent into the mountains', he said, 'each step on the ascendant.' As he proceeded he expected new horizons to open up. He urged the workers to follow and keep up an ever-ascending process. 'Our group is being increasingly recognised as a great integrating force in the midst of the disintegrating forces that encircle the country today. People have been thoroughly disillusioned, now they are turning to us with hope and expectation. This calls for vigilance and hard work on our part. We must see that we do not similarly disillusion them.'

The days had passed swiftly and people began to disperse. I walked to Vinoba's bungalow for the last time to say good-bye to Krishnaraj, to Tai and to the others. I didn't think I should intrude again on Vinoba but he asked for me. I went to him. He handed me a slim volume entitled 'The Essence of Christianity' compiled by him. On the fly-leaf he had written: 'Truth, Love, Compassion,' and signed his name and the date. I was deeply moved, particularly when I learnt that people were clamouring for his autograph, even bought his books for him to sign his name, something he would rarely do.

If District Dan was a great achievement, then the six-day meeting at Ballia was a triumph. The atmosphere had been strangely mixed. Excited discussions, quiet talks, laughter and light-heartedness, together with rushing feet and slow-moving groups, impatience at delays and changed timings, combined to make up an ever moving crowd of white-clad figures.

But perhaps what I shall most remember about Ballia is love, loving care and loving kindness, loving people and loving thoughts, as expressed so vividly by Vinoba's final gesture to me.

The time for our present assignment in India was drawing to its close. For months I had been steeped in Gramdan and Sarvodaya. I had been living it, thinking it, dreaming about it. I listened to many diverse opinions and became deeply involved. When Radhakrishna challenged me to present Gramdan not as an academic study but as an interpretation of my own experience, I didn't know how difficult a task he had set me.

On the many occasions when I talked to Westerners on the subject I was asked by the sociologist if I was a sociologist, by the economist was I an economist, by the agriculturist was I an agriculturist, and each time I replied: I wish I were, perhaps it would have made my task easier. I am no specialist, just myself. But that's your strength, others told me. I would like to believe that this was so for it gives me confidence in presenting this book for what it is, namely: *Fragments of a Vision*.

At the end of each chapter I have drawn my conclusions and reactions to the circumstances which I had encountered, and now? Is it possible to make a final assessment?

'What is Gramdan?' foreigners have asked. 'What about Gramdan?' questions the Indian. 'One hears and knows nothing. Does it do any good?' If one moves within the movement, Sarvodaya workers and Gramdan villages seem to be everywhere. If one looks at it from without, from the view-point of people either not interested, or engrossed in the pursuit of other ideologies, or in self-centred occupations, one could easily dismiss Gramdan as a fringe activity, of less than marginal importance.

When I have thrust at me across the breakfast table in Delhi, Bombay or Calcutta: What do you think about Gramdan? I can only reply, 'There is no clear-cut answer because no answer is ever simple nor can all that needs to be said be put in a nutshell'.

During my previous stay in India, 1961 to 63, the Gramdan movement had reached its lowest ebb. Vinoba's land-gift movement in the early fifties aroused the hopes of millions in India, touched the imagination of people all over the world. What happened? Between the years 1956 and 1960 barely 300,000 acres were added in land-gifts, bringing the total to roughly four and a half million acres. Up till now nearly two million of these have been distributed among the landless. It is true that about one and a half million acres were unfit for distribution and useless. The press immediately made capital of this and proclaimed that all Bhoodan land was worthless, the whole thing was a sham; and this was largely responsible for the resulting cynicism.

In 1957 Gramdan villages totalled 3,521. By 1960 the number had crept up to 4,785. During his second visit to Bihar Vinoba tried an experiment by demanding that every landowner donate one twentieth of his cultivated land to the landless. The result was that 80% of the land thus collected could be immediately distributed. This experiment marked the transition from 'old' to 'new' Gramdan.

In 'old' Gramdan all the available land was distributed among the families of the village according to need. After some interval distributions could be revised to meet different situations and changing needs. Such Gramdan did not appeal to the upper and middle classes of landowners. Only the lower sections surrendered their land for redistribution among themselves, and the overall situation was little altered. With 'new' Gramdan Vinoba devised a formula which would make it easier for rich landowners to participate, but it also demanded giving by the landless and the labourers in kind—free labour and earnings—to create an atmosphere of mutual give and take. It also provided for the establishment of a village council embracing one member from each family for the first time.

When I returned to India for a brief period in 1965 I don't think anybody ever mentioned the word Gramdan, although I was in touch with organisations and government departments involved in community development as well as with schools of social work.

But 1967 proved to be different. After my disheartening and depressing experience among Bombay and Delhi society I was more than intrigued to be told by the director of a school of social sciences: We too are seeking a new approach. Community development has failed. We tend more and more to look to the Gandhian constructive workers in an attempt to share our experiences and evolve methods and techniques which would bring about the necessary change in our society. Nothing could have given me greater encouragement. Instead of finding opposition and disdain I encountered sympathy, understanding and an earnest endeavour to bring about mutual co-operation and an exchange of experiences which should prove beneficial to both professional and constructive social workers.

Soon after my arrival the Gandhian Institute of Studies published 'Towards a Philosophy of Social Work in India', the result of a joint study by the two groups over a period of three years. It attempts to bridge the gulf that exists between theory and practice and to develop social action in the light of experiences by both sides. So instead of entering a closed society engaged in social and agrarian reforms I had an immediate means of exchanging opinions on a rational basis with people who were neither biased nor putting forward pre-conceived ideas.

In March 1968 a seminar on the Gramdan movement was held in Delhi for the purpose of bringing together scholars and prominent constructive workers. The preface to the subsequent report states at the outset: "Probably the most significant movement for change in rural areas which is not Government-sponsored is the Gramdan movement." Discussions at the seminar highlighted the need for collaboration. But not only that, they supported my own impressions and, perhaps equally important, showed the extent to which the best among the Sarvodaya workers are prepared to go in

evaluating their own performance.

On another occasion a sociologist asked me, what is success, what failure? There are only negative and positive aspects. And he mentioned a few. He believed that, at the state level, Sarvodaya leaders did too much theorising without giving their ideas sufficient practical shape. They knew scientific aspects but did nothing towards their scientific implementation. The stimuli for social change should lead to changes in the structure of society. So far social and psychological change has been inadequate, temporary and peripheral. Real contact with the people, and constructive work, should have produced better results by now, and he gave as one of the reasons wrong timing Vinoba should have started his campaign in 1948. He waited too long to introduce Gramdan, and when he did, it coincided with the diminishing power of Nehru whose theory had been to develop the developed rather than tackle grass-root problems. The sociologist thought that the processes of change had been skipped over at all levels, that the ground had not been adequately prepared, and that Vinoba knew this. There should have been greater morale building. There should also have been far greater collaboration at the top administrative level, as J.P. is trying to bring about in Bihar. He criticised Sarvodaya workers for insufficient interest in Parliamentary affairs.

Opinions differ whether or not the movement should become a political party. It would be more dynamic if it did, says one; it would destroy its chances of success, says another. Our problems are too big to be dealt with on utopian lines, says a third. Still another declares: 'For Gramdan to be successful it should be coupled with non-violent power or resistance against all forms of social oppression, the worst ones being untouchability, casteism and economic exploitation. Vinoba's ideas are not yet the last word in social change. But non-violence must not mean non-action. Change in all sectors of society is necessary; change in individual thinking, change of habits and relationships within the community, and adaptation to changing circumstances.' The speaker, a journalist, would like to see a few breath of air come into the movement to counteract the tightening grip on society by industrial mono-

polies, by economic and political power.

'But we Indians by and large will not see an approaching catastrophe', he sighed. 'We would rather close our eyes. The common man believes in a passive cow-like existence combined with a one-day short-term philosophy of the tiger's destructive action. He will not exercise himself to find out the root cause of his malady. Gramdan can change the situation. But a non-violent movement requires good organisation.' He criticised the movement for not having thought it necessary to build up better rapport with the press. Intellectuals remain unaware of what is happening in the movement, and its message does not reach the majority of the people through the local language press. I didn't argue with him. I remembered the Koyna earthquake last December when the press mentioned every organisation giving relief and aid except the Gramdan workers who I knew from personal correspondence were in the fore-front of operations. Publicity for Sarvodaya would challenge existing society into a painstaking process of evaluation and the painful exercise of self-analysis. Who is prepared for this?

Questions arise constantly from one's observations. Why is it so difficult to change people's behaviour pattern or make them aware of the need for change? I believe that one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of concerted progress lies in the Indian's individualistic trend. I cannot think of any other people in whom this is so strongly developed. One only has to watch his attitude towards his surroundings to recognise this without going into the question of religious or other motivation. By and large the Indian is obsessed with personal cleanliness and an incredible disregard for others. As long as he remains 'untouched' filth and squalor are not his concern. A people who can produce the most artistic and beautiful handicrafts and at the same time live surrounded by the most abject ugliness must remain an enigma. On the other hand, the poor man lives so closely linked to his environment that he is oblivious of its existence. The Westerner has developed a high sensitivity due to isolated living within the sanctity of his four walls, separated from external impacts. The poor Indian cannot escape the noise, the dirt, the dust

overcrowding and animals. He does not see, hear, or feel disturbed by the things which crushed my spirits. Whereas I place my sandal-shod feet with deliberate care he goes bare-foot, he does not mind where he steps for he feels himself part of the soil. He is physically, emotionally and unconsciously fused with matter because he sees another reality beyond the immediate, and can relate to it instead of giving to this existence a projection of his personality with all life's limitations.

When we force onto him a new awareness, when we break this fusion without the means of simultaneously changing the environment, we endanger his sense of security which is rooted in something deeper even than the bond which links him to his family. He feels himself adrift in a world which has nothing to offer except materialism in place of known values. Gramdan at least recognises this aspect and endeavours to build on the traditional.

The movement has been criticised for drawing widely on Hindu religious sources, projecting a religious rather than a secular image. At the same time, for precisely this reason it appeals where more sophisticated methods have failed. Yet if the movement is to attract the intelligentsia and the right type of workers in adequate numbers, it is essential that it should preserve a secular, non-denominational character. What is more, Sarvodaya literature lacks writings of a style and content which would appeal to the educated. Unedited translations from speeches in Hindi and other indigenous languages addressed to villagers, often phrased in parables, do not make stimulating reading. The insistence on an out-moded code of personal conduct and dress is also turning young men and women from a cause they would otherwise support. The dearth of workers is one of the movement's greatest handicaps, and yet the obtaining of new Gramdans has become of more importance than the consolidating of old ones or the intensifying of constructive work. Why? This was one of the questions that I asked repeatedly. Invariably I was told that Gramdan in isolation had no meaning, that it was a revolution which had to sweep the country. Block Dan, District Dan, State Dan, nothing less was good enough. 'You talk about a sweeping revolution', I scoffed. 'It's a creeping

evolution, nothing more.' 'But just look at the number of villages that have declared Gramdan in the last two years, since the Toofan movement began—the taking of villages by storm—over 70,000 villages, more than 400 blocks and nine districts have come under Gramdan. Doesn't that prove anything to you?' they said. 'But has it any meaning? How many villagers know what it is all about?' I insisted. 'If you put the question directly you may draw a blank', Prem Bhai pointed out. 'You know that as well as I do. How many times have you got to put your questions, differently phrased, before you can elicit a reply from people belonging to a backward community. If you ask whether a group of people has visited the village recently, he will say yes. If you ask why they came, he will tell you what they said, without knowing that he was talking about Gramdan.'

I was only half convinced. I still questioned the validity of Gramdan villages collected for the sake of achieving targets. So while rejoicing with the workers at Ballia I probed further. 'What is your technique, how do you go about your business?' I asked Omkarchand who is in charge of the work in the Punjab. 'What good is the collection of signatures if nothing else happens. This makes it a mere paper transaction.' 'Oh no, it doesn't,' said he and Prakash Bhai with one voice. And they proceeded to explain. 'We have found that wherever we conduct our campaign,—and we involve all sections of society—people realise more and more that they have to make a choice between destructive violence and Sarvodaya to solve local, national and international problems.'

'Before we start our campaign in the villages we make certain preparations which include the mobilisation of the intelligentsia, teachers and students, leaders and members of political parties, panchayat members at block and district level, landlords, money-lenders, other wealthy people, government and block officials. We speak to them at five separate meetings convened for that purpose. We invite sympathisers to support us during these talks and discussions. After the meetings we organise a two-day training camp for workers and for those who wish to join us, from among government, block and panchayat officials and from among the teachers



and students. The main function of the camp is to give the campaigners a clear concept of the basic principles of Gramdan. Usually about a hundred take part and move about in groups covering some 6000 homes in five days. When our people enter the village they visit first of all one of the big land-owners. When he is convinced and has signed the Gramdan declaration we ask him to accompany us, and together we call on other landowners until every house has been covered. Then we call a general meeting of all the villagers.

As a next step we return to the villages to set up the village councils and urge the villagers to eliminate quarrels, settle disputes instead of taking them to court, and do away with moneylenders.

'Come and join in starting one of our campaigns', they invited me. I agreed and we exchanged addresses. All through September I waited for news of their future programme. First the postal strike and lastly a teachers' strike stopped the organisation of a campaign during October. In November I would not be free. November was too close to our departure. So I never saw Onkarchand and his band of workers in action. I went to Indore instead in response to a warm invitation from Narendra Dune.

As soon as I arrived I was whisked off to Kasturba gram where I could see something of the women's training programme. But for once my luck did not hold. I, who am used in the least accident to any shock and had travelled constantly over the last year, on suffering all sorts of conditions without any mishap apart from one late slip, slipped, on all four places, into a latrine. On the wet bath room floor in the girls' hostel my leg sprang from the floor into the latrine, and as I lay on the ground I pushed the concrete back with a terrific whack. I lifted my foot out of the water, pushed the toe nail down again and hoped for the best. I couldn't walk and the pain was not conducive to enjoying the Kasturigram. I only hoped that I would be able to walk home 'da. To have been too lame and not getting the village would have been too disappointing.

In the evening, even still limping but I caught the bus and joined the camp at the main Dharmasala at Baran, a small town in the West Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh.

a distance of 108 miles from Indore. I hadn't thought where I would be going or looked at a map. I hadn't realised I would be driving through the Satpura Hills. Even if I had I don't think I would have been prepared for the beautiful panorama which stretched out before me whenever the bus crossed the crown of another hill. The bus was crowded and bumpy, the seats uncomfortable, my toe hurt and it was hot, but it didn't matter. I could only feel joy, felt as if India was presenting me with another gift of her glorious scenery which uplifted me to heights of aesthetic pleasure. I wanted to burst into songs of praise with the birds that soared into the air or join the painter storks which stood at the water's edge steeped in contemplation, their shining black and white and rose-pink feathers enhancing the grey-green rocks and hills under a cloudless pale-blue sky.

For the last two weeks the workers had been campaigning in the Barvani block. Government officials lent their jeeps and came with us to the villages. The word Gramdan was bandied about like a tennis ball, and no other topic discussed all through the afternoon. They were interested, sympathetic, ready to support the workers' efforts. Even if they were still sceptical they were certainly not in an obstructive mood. 'We are bound by government rules and regulations,' they said, 'apart from that why not support Gramdan?'

Silavad is a Panchayat village. It has its own post office, a primary health centre, a middle school. Its population of 2000 people is one third tribal, one third Muslim, one third Hindu. It was market day and the village was alive with people bargaining among the wares spread on the ground. A scene of shifting figures, a kaleidoscope of colours falling apart and coming together. I watched from the Panchayat office through the open doors while gradually the men gathered for a meeting.

'Has anything happened in the village during the last two weeks?' I eventually began my questioning. 'Yes, some people came and talked about Gramdan. Yes, they had heard about Gramdan last year when others had come to the village, and then as now explained Gramdan. Yes, they had declared Gramdan. It meant the development of the

village, it meant family unity, the whole village becoming one family, it meant that they all had equal rights. How would they bring about unity? They would decide matters by consensus. What prevented unity before? Caste divisions, party-politics and economic difficulties. Why should Gramdan change this? They would solve their problems within the village and not seek help from outside. Why did they need Gramdan to bring about these changes? Gramdan is changing our hearts which are inside us and so we can change the situation. How? People will participate in administering the village through the village council. What is the difference between the village council and the village panchayat? All voting men constitute the village council and one member from each family will constitute the working committee. The panchayat is the government, the village council is us. But you elected the panchayat? Yes, that is true, we gave our vote, but it was a majority, minority decision. How can the panchayat help Gramdan and Gramdan help the panchayat? The whole village council will become the panchayat. How would they send representatives to the district panchayat? By consensus, of course, came the prompt reply. How will they have the courage to resist pressure groups? They would learn by experience. They will be holding their first village council meeting on the 15th October and invite some of the workers to guide them on this occasion.

One woman came in. One only. Where are all the women? I asked. At home. Why was she here? She had come marketing and she was curious to know what was going on, so she came to see. She didn't know why this meeting was being held. She had never heard of Gramdan. Another woman joined her. She too was completely ignorant. In this village at least, none of the women were of sufficient account to be told of such a decisive step as the declaration of Gramdan. I couldn't let this pass, so I railed the men on their behalf. The first woman, a widow and a real harridan, obviously agreed and delivered a speech which caused bursts of laughter.

Some 40% of the villagers are landless. I asked one of them. Do you want land? Yes. Do you understand Gramdan? No. Have you signed the declaration? Yes. Why if you

don't know what it is all about? I was told I would know afterwards.

In spite of the fact that this man and the women had not been involved, that possibly others were ignorant of the meaning of Gramdan, so much understanding and awareness had already been created that it bode well for the future. We moved on to another village where 50% had declared Gramdan two years ago. Now they had the full quota. They would call the first meeting of the village council after the Diwali holidays—the festival of lights.

It was all most gratifying, almost too good to be true. Sure enough, at Rajghat village, matters were not so good. Thakur Bara Singh is 55 years of age and owns 30 acres of dry land. He had heard about Gramdan ever since its inception through the celebrations held at the Gandhi memorial every 12th February. Rajghat on the banks of the Narbada had its share of Gandhi's ashes sprinkled on the waters of the river. But he had never given Gramdan any thought or understood its meaning. He still didn't understand. How can I donate my land when it belongs to the government? He thought that by paying revenue he had lost his ownership. But he had signed the declaration because all the people in the village had done so. His mind was in utter confusion. He didn't agree with the government's imposition of land ceilings, and mixed up voluntary land donation with government regulations. Poor man, but he had signed!

I could see that Mahendra Bhai who had come with me from Indore felt just as perturbed as I. For him too this was a tour of evaluation.

At Borlai things were different again. Here the workers had not been able to persuade the villagers to sign the declaration. Only sixty had been present at the meeting, not a good turn-out for a village of 13,000 people. I was assured it wasn't for lack of interest. Business of one kind and another had kept them away.

The Sarvodaya workers came last week, said one, owner of 32 acres, and he explained the principles of Gramdan and his willingness to vest his land in the community. Did he sign the declaration? No. Why not? He was absent. How then

did he know about Gramdan in such detail? His father had been present, he had told him. His father had signed the declaration. Most of the troubles in the village were stirred up by outsiders and political factions. Gramdan would stop this. Onkar Bhai, 45 years old and an Añir by caste, supported him. He too knew what Gramdan was about and he was one of the few who had signed the declaration. He would work on the villagers and persuade them to follow his example. Once the village had declared Gramdan he would willingly give one twentieth of his twelve or thirteen acres for distribution among the landless. The block village level worker was present. He was going to help the villagers to come to a decision. He knew that once the village worked on Gramdan lines it would make his task easier. The teachers too felt themselves involved and would play their part.

If the workers were disappointed that only a few villagers had signed the declaration, that they could not count Borlai as a Gramdan village, I felt happy. The villagers who had been at the meeting had understood, they were passing on what they knew to others. They were not going to rush into things. They had asked for time to consider the matter. When they did decide in favour of Gramdan their decision would be a responsible one.

We travelled by bus to Rajpur where a hundred or more campaigners had collected for the night before again dispersing. They had with them 25 trainees. The training camp held simultaneously with the campaign was one of the most impressive innovations of the Madhya Pradesh Sarvodaya Mandal. These campers had come from the villages in the district and varied in ages from sixteen to sixty. They were of different class, caste, religion and if the camp achieved nothing else it certainly acted as an integrating force. There were three young women among them, one tribal, one Harijan, one Brahmin. They worked together, slept together, ate together, had come to love one another. For two weeks the campers received intensive theoretical instructions, for the remainder of the six weeks training period they accompanied the workers into the villages, preaching what they would later practise when they returned to their own villages.

We were sitting together on the verandah of the government rest house where I was billeted for the night. It was getting late, we had to break up the meeting and get some sleep. No one wanted to leave. Could they meet me again? There would not be time, our bus left at seven o'clock next morning. They could come early, immediately after prayers at five o'clock. No, they would hold prayers on the verandah and immediately following we could have another meeting. How could I say no in the face of such enthusiasm? So it happened that I woke to the murmur of a hundred voices, that I washed and dressed to the sound of hymns of praise surging forth into the dawn. Then a hush of silence fell as I joined them.

At Indore Mahendra Bhai and I recounted our experiences of the last few days to Narendra Dube. 'We cannot expect that everyone will understand,' he pointed out. 'Whenever has this happened in any revolution? Hundreds will lead and thousands will follow. Action will follow the acceptance of the ideology. Gramdan failed when we worked in isolated pockets. Today we are making an impact because we concentrate on areas. As we spread, more and more people will be touched. Sooner or later everyone will have to make a choice. People cannot ignore us much longer.'

Will Gramdan fail? Will it succeed? I recalled my meetings with some of the brilliant leaders in the movement, remembered Kshitish Roy Choudhury's gentle firmness, Dwarko's stubborn determination, Radhakrishna Menon's restless energy, Govind Shinde's sensitivity, Verabramham's dedication, remembered the glowing face of a one-time free-lance journalist just returned from several months' work with the Shanti Sena in border areas who wore his white khadi like a shining armour, remembered Jaganathan's unshakable conviction that he could sweep the whole of Tamilnad into Gramdan. Perhaps he more than any body symbolises a different strength, a different power. Looking like a Roman gladiator, slim, muscular, firm chin thrust out, shawl thrown over his square shoulders, he is not afraid of 'rocking the boat' if it achieves results. There are others like him, more and more convinced that the

tide has turned in their favour, that it is up to the men of their generation to force the pace.

Whether Gramdan succeeds in part or wholly, whether its principles are implemented to the full or not, does it really matter? The tide is turning. Changes are taking place with or without Gramdan. Old values are breaking down, old ties are being loosened. In some cases society is making a last desperate stand against the newly emerging forces which can no longer be held at bay. In the last resort what matters is the faith of thousands who believe that they can bring about a change of heart, a change in the attitude of people to one another, that change for the better is possible, that man is capable of overcoming evil by good.

## **GLOSSARY OF INDIAN WORDS**

**Acharya:** a title meaning spiritual guide or teacher

**Ashram:** socio-religious settlement

**Bakhsheesh:** a tip, money dispensed to beggars

**Bund:** a small embankment, hence 'bunded'=banked up

**Bapu:** daddy, term affectionately applied to Gandhi

**Behn, bahin:** sister, as in Mira Behn

**Bhoodan:** land gift

**Brahmin:** Hindu of the priestly (highest) caste

**Chappal:** a kind of sandal

**Chikoo:** a small, brown fruit

**Dan:** gift

**Dhoti:** a cloth worn by Hindu men round the waist and legs

**Diva:** a lamp

**Ghat:** steps leading down to a river, used for bathing and washing clothes

**Gramdan:** village gift

**Gur:** raw sugar

**Harijan:** child of God, name applied by Gandhi to the Untouchables

**Hind:** India

**Holi:** a spring festival

**Idli:** a South Indian food speciality, made from rice

**Jai:** long live, as in Jai Hind



an affectionate, but respectful suffix, as in Gandhiji

Kachcha, kutchra: made of poor materials (opp. of pakka)

Kutchra: centre

Kutchra: home-spun cloth

Lakh: 100,000

Lungi: a long cloth worn round waist and legs

Maund: a weight=app. 80 lbs.

Mullah: a Muslim divine

Nagar: a town, as in Shantinagar

Naye paise (n.p.): new pice (100 n.p.=1 rupee)

Nallah: a dry water-course

Om: name of God

Pukka, pukka: properly made (opp. of kachcha)

Panchayat: a council of five, the traditional village council

Raj: rule

Sabha: meeting, assembly

Sadhu: ascetic, mendicant

Samaj: society

Sangh: society

Sarva: all

Sarvodaya: the uplift of all

Satyagraha: literally, the pursuit of truth

Sena: army

Seva: service

Shanti: peace

Shri: a formal title, Mr.

Sitar: a musical string instrument

Taluk: a district

Tonga: a horse-drawn cart

Tongawala: a tonga driver

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

**AMRIT KAUR, Rajkumari (Princess):** one of Gandhi's secretaries, later Minister of Health in the Government of India.

**BHOODAN:** the name given by Vinoba Bhave to his landgift movement.

**BLOCK:** a statutory area within a District, usually comprising some 60-70 villages

**CRIMINAL TRIBE:** a designation applied originally during the British period to certain tribes which traditionally gained a livelihood from crime, e.g. thugs.

**DESAI, MAHADEV:** Gandhi's disciple, friend and secretary.

**DRAVIDA MUNNETRA KAZHAGHAM (DMK):** the Dravidian Progressive League, name of the ruling (1971) political party in Tamil Nadu.

**GANDHIAN INSTITUTE OF STUDIES:** a research organisation in Benares, founded by Jayaprakash Narayan.

**GRAMDAN:** name given by Vinoba Bhave to the second phase of Bhoodan, meaning village gift.

**KASTURBA:** the name of Gandhi's wife.

**MALAYALI:** native of the Malabar coast.

**P.W.D.:** Public Works Department.

**RAJGHAT:** a place name; Gandhi's cremation ground on the outskirts of Delhi.

**REDDY:** a prominent caste name of Andhra Pradesh

**SARVA SEVA SANGH:** the organisation set up to implement the Sarvodaya philosophy, with headquarters previously at Benares, now at Wardha.

**SARVODAYA:** a term coined by Gandhi for the movement which he hoped would succeed to the Congress Party after Independence. Literally, the uplift of all. The word was adopted by Vinoba Bhave when he founded the Sarvodaya Samaj in 1948.

**SATYAGRAHA:** a term coined by Gandhi to denote non-violent civil disobedience, as in the phrase 'to offer satyagraha'. Literally, adherence to truth.

**S.C.I.:** Service Civile Internationale, the international work-camp organisation founded by the Swiss Quaker, Pierre Ceresole.

**Share-cropping:** the system whereby landless labourers receive fixed shares of the crops which they gather for the land-lord.

**TANK:** large man-made village pond.

**WORKERS:** used in the technical sense of paid workers of the Gramdan movement.